



Gallup Pakistan History Project's Weekend Read 39: **Revisiting Historiography of the Partition of the Indian** **Subcontinent: An Analysis of Trends in 2015 by Abdullah** **Waqar Tajwar, Research Executive at Gallup Pakistan**

Abstract: The analysis presented in this article is predicated on the findings gleaned from the 'Partition 1947 Report', a recent publication of Gallup Pakistan that aims to deconstruct the partition of the Indian Subcontinent through an empirical understanding of public perception and views on various facets relating to that historical event. Respondents were asked a series of questions on a myriad of topics, ranging from which ethnicity was responsible for the chaos and destruction that ensued in that time, the views of Pakistanis on Indians, the Pakistan Movement and the Two Nation Theory, the role of the Media and education systems today in understanding the Partition, to the treatment of women in the lands that bore the brunt of the Partition. All in all, the respondents were asked 43 questions. Out of those, the ones that are under consideration today are questions on the narratives of violence, The Pakistan Movement, the Two-Nation Theory and the role of education in making Pakistanis understand the partition of the subcontinent. These particular themes have been selected in order to understand their impact on feelings of nationalism in Pakistanis today and to make the subsequent claim of a need to revisit Pakistani nationalism in order to make the Pakistani society a more tolerant and inclusive one. Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their experiences and views of the violence that erupted in 1947. They were asked the extent to which they felt Muslims had carried out violations of life, property and honour of people of other religions. 3% responded by saying that Muslims had carried out a lot of violence, 8% said that they carried out violence to some extent, 10% said that they carried out very little violence while a major 48% said that there was no violence on the Muslims part at all. 31% did not respond. On a broader level, respondents were asked who they felt was most responsible for chaos and clashes during partition of India. 56% mentioned Hindus, 12% mentioned Sikhs and 5% mentioned Muslims in response to this question. 12% on the other hand said that everyone was responsible. 5% gave other responses and 10% did not respond. Moreover, respondents were asked what they believed was the root cause behind the mass violence and bloodshed during partition. 37% said that religious differences were the fundamental cause, 17% said that it was due to political reasons and 12% mentioned social/societal differences. A large 30% also said that all of the above stated reasons were responsible for violence and 3% did not respond. The next set of questions asked the respondents if, in a hypothetical situation, they would have voted in favour or opposition of Pakistan's creation in 1947. An overwhelming majority (92%) said that they would have voted in favour and 8% said they would have voted in opposition. On the Two-Nation Theory, respondents were asked whether they would have

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supported it or not if they had also been present in 1947. In response, 80% said that they would have supported it whereas 19% said that they would not have supported it. The final cluster of questions that will form the basis of this weekend read is on the curriculum in Pakistani educational institutions and how it teaches students of history on the events leading to the partition of the Indian subcontinent as well as the impact that this partition had on the people of India. The first question asked the respondents about their level of satisfaction with the syllabi of history textbooks in school. 28% said that they were completely satisfied with children's history textbooks in schools and 30% said that they were satisfied to some extent while 24% said that they were not satisfied and 17% did not respond. Respondents were also asked for their opinion regarding the accuracy with which they felt that history textbooks in schools narrated events during, before and after partition. 27% said that history textbooks were completely accurate, 38% said that they were accurate to some extent and 18% said that they were completely inaccurate. 17% did not respond. The last question in this section targeted a more nuanced opinion regarding the understanding of partition through history syllabi in schools. According to the results, 42% respondents said that history textbooks are currently only useful in understanding the leaders' and statesmen's politics regarding partition while 36% said that the textbooks are also useful in understanding the lives of the ordinary people during the events that led to partition. 21% did not respond to this question.

Every year, in the month of August, the two nation-states of India and Pakistan celebrate the days of their independence. It was in the month of August of 1947 that the British colonialists, after three centuries of ruling over the Indian Subcontinent, decided to leave their most prized possession, famously dubbed as the 'Golden Sparrow', and partitioned it into the two independent nation states of India and Pakistan; the former having a Hindu-majority while the latter a Muslim-majority. This decision of the British started in motion one of the largest human migrations in human history, as millions of Muslims headed to West and East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) while an equally large number of Hindus and Sikhs trudged in the opposite direction. Lands where countless generations of these different ethnicities had lived in mutual cooperation and relative harmony suddenly became hotbeds of sectarian violence. Borders were drawn on religious identities and each religious entity was equally culpable of committing atrocities against the other. This hasty decision of the British to leave India forced countless people to leave behind their properties, their valuables, their lands and even their families, as they migrated to the either India or Pakistan in destitution. This partition bore witness to carnage on an audacious scale, with massacres, arson, forced conversions, mass abductions, and savage

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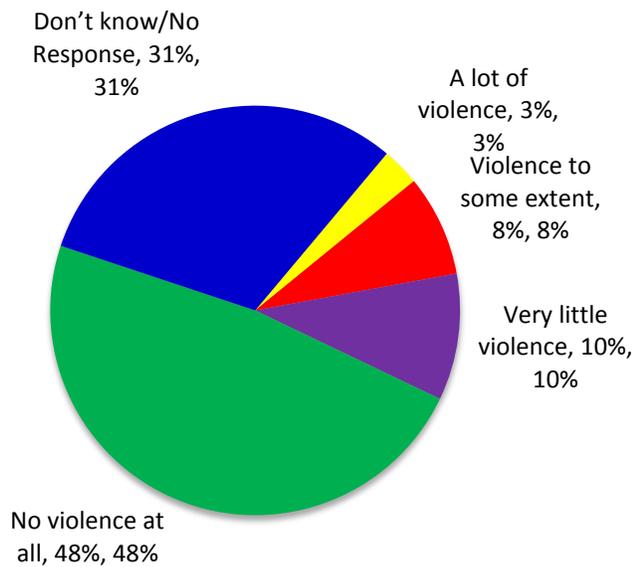
sexual violence. Some seventy-five thousand women were raped, and many of them were then disfigured or dismembered. Packed trains as well as caravans heading on foot from one country to the other were attacked by enraged mobs and gangs on both sides of the ethnic divide, resulting in the death of all, irrespective of age or gender. This, then, was the great partition of India. It is an event that has defined and continues to define the identity of both India and Pakistan. In the words of Ayesha Jalal herself: “A defining moment that is neither beginning nor end, partition continues to influence how the peoples and states of postcolonial South Asia envisage their past, present and future.”

Keeping Jalal’s words in our head, the purpose of Gallup Pakistan’s ‘Partition Report 1947’ becomes clearer. It is to see how the subsequent historiography of this event has shaped the identities of future generations of Pakistanis and their perceptions and notions of India and the Hindus. This weekend read will go a step ahead and use the insights of public opinion provided by this report to establish the link between Pakistani public opinion being fashioned by the biases and shortcomings present within the way post-partition historiography is written and disseminated within Pakistan and how that history has perversely impacted on Pakistani Nationalism. If the recent history of Pakistan is anything to go by, the need to revisit Pakistani nationalism has become all the more pertinent. The intolerance, predominantly born out of religious differences, has thoroughly seeped within the Pakistani society. Reports of enraged Muslim mobs torching peaceful Christian villages and lynching Christian couples on unproven claims of desecrating the Quran have surfaced in the previous year. The peaceful and predominantly Shia Hazara community in Baluchistan has unfortunately borne the brunt of far too many heinous acts of terrorism. This intolerance that is being seen on a daily basis in Pakistan does have an ideological basis that is mired in the conception of Pakistan and on how the Pakistani state has appropriated the history of Pakistan’s inception to serve its own ideological agenda. Before delving further into this subject matter, we will look at some of the insights into public opinion on matters pertaining to the partition of India and beyond.

The first question that was asked from a representative sample of Pakistanis was: ‘During partition of India, scores of Muslims were massacred and injured. According to some people, Muslims had also carried out violations of life, property and honour against people of other religions. According to others however, Muslims had not carried out any kind of violations (for instance loot, plunder and murder). In your opinion, to what extent did the Muslims carry out such violations?’ In response to this question, the largest proportion of Pakistanis (48%) said that Muslims had not carried out any kind of violence at the time of partition. The second largest proportion of Pakistanis (31%) chose not to respond to this question at all. (10%) of the respondents said that Muslims had carried out very little violence while a further (8%) of Pakistanis felt that Muslims too had carried out violence to some extent. Only 3% of the respondents stated that Muslims had carried out a lot of violence against people to different ethnicities.

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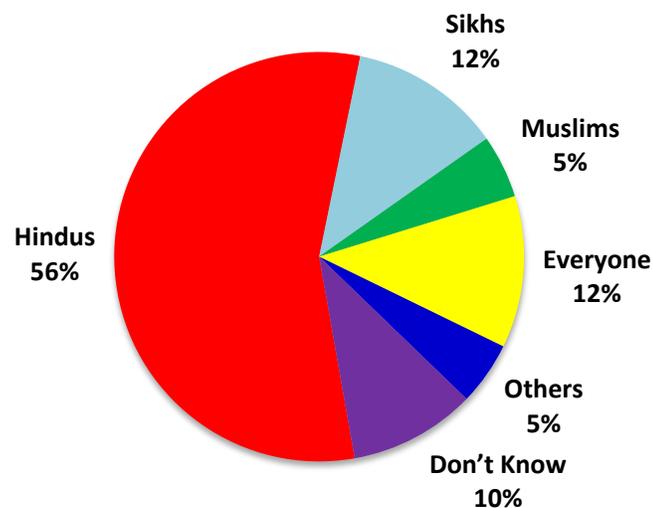
Thus, if we were to aggregate the percentages of the respondents who felt that Muslims were guilty of acts of violence at the time of India’s partition, it still comes out to be (21%), significantly lesser than the proportion of Pakistanis who feel that the Muslims were not on the giving end of any sort of violence. These statistics are presented in a pie chart below.



Source: Partition Report, conducted by Gallup Pakistan, Nov 30 - Dec 14, 2015

In light of these findings above, it becomes vital to unearth the opinion of Pakistanis on who they felt was the chief perpetrator in causing chaos and violence during the events of that time. The ‘Partition 1947 Report’ therefore asked a representative sample of the Pakistani public the following question: ‘In your opinion, who is most responsible in causing chaos and clashes during partition of India?’. The response to this question was not surprising at all. An outright majority of Pakistanis (56%) labeled the Hindus as the chief instigators and enforcers of sectarian violence at the time of the partition. (12%) of Pakistanis felt that it was Sikhs who were the ones most responsible for all the chaos whereas only (5%) of respondents felt that the Muslims were the main transgressors. There was also a proportion of Pakistanis (12%) that felt that everyone was responsible for the violence that ensued at the time of the partition of the Subcontinent.

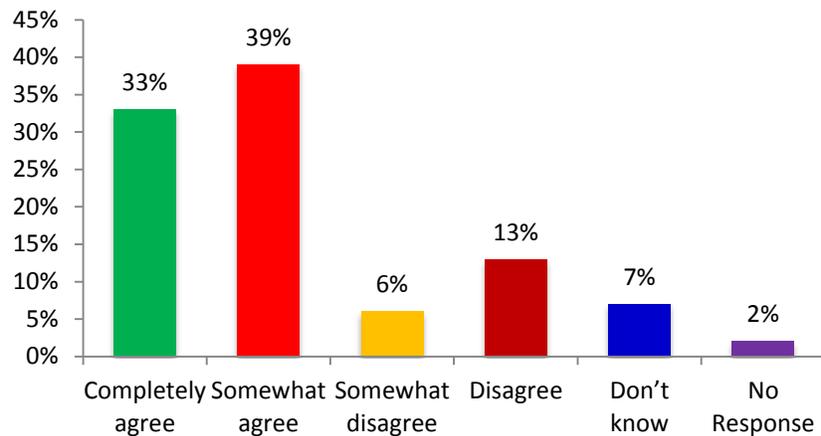
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The responses generated by Pakistanis on this question are certainly rather predictable. Ever since separation, both Pakistan and India have been at each other's throats far more often than not. For Pakistanis, the Hindu has always been seen the enemy and the Pakistani state has vehemently maintained this narrative of pitting India as Pakistan's perennial enemy and the Hindu as an alien 'other' out to get the pious Muslim. Thus, it is this line of thinking that has influenced all post-partition historiography of the Indian-subcontinent. Opposition to India and the Hindus unfortunately is still very much a cornerstone of Pakistani nationalism. The respondents are then asked the following question which also empirically validates this dominant narrative within Pakistan of viewing the Hindu as the enemy: 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? [A- Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs have always remained enemies]'. (33%) of the respondents completely agreed with this statement while another (39%) were in partial agreement of the claim that Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs have always remained enemies. In comparison, only (6%) of the respondents partially disagreed with this statement whereas another (13%) were in total disagreement with the notion that these three ethnicities have always been enemies. Thus, a resounding majority of Pakistanis (72%) considered Hindus and Sikhs to be their enemies. A tabular illustration of these troubling statistics is given below.

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It is this line of thinking that views all other ethnicities as enemies, which has begun to eat away at the social fabric of Pakistan. The rising intolerance that can be seen within the Pakistani society is based on viewing anyone other than a Muslim as an outsider and one who is unworthy of being a Pakistani. This empirical statistic clearly does not bode well for the Sikh and Hindu communities still residing within Pakistan. That is not to say that something similar is not happening within India. However, that claim can certainly never be used to justify something that is inherently against the setting up of a tolerant and pluralistic society. The basis of this public opinion, for the most part, lies in the ideological indoctrination that has been carried out by the Pakistani state ever since the partition of India. The indoctrination being that by setting the Muslims up against the Hindus and branding the Hindus as the perennial villains in the history of the Indian subcontinent, the struggle for Pakistan struggle has thus been branded as a Muslim struggle, thus basing Pakistani nationalism in Muslim nationalism and reorienting the foundation of the state of Pakistan on Islam and as a homeland only for the Muslims of India. It is this bias present within the historiography of Pakistan that is becoming evident in the empirical results of this report. The fact that an outright majority of Pakistanis feel that Hindus and Sikhs have always been enemies of Muslims clearly speaks volumes about a clear lack of objectivity in the way Hindus and Sikhs have been portrayed to the Pakistani masses.

It is therefore fundamental to shed a more objective light on the historical events the led to the partition of the subcontinent as only then can this claim that Hindus and Muslims were always enemies be debunked. The events of the late 20th and the early 21st century in the subcontinent were that of an

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increasing consciousness among the masses of India along religious lines. A Hindu became conscious of his Hinduness whereas the same applied to a Muslim or a Sikh. It may not be so inaccurate to state that this stirring of political consciousness among the different religious ethnicities was mostly a product of Colonialism. The British Raj began to first place the people of India into the classifications of communities for administrative purposes. There is no evidence to suggest that a distinctive black and white boundary between the different ethnicities of India was ever in existence before the British Raj. However, it was in fact this decision of the British to view people as part of their religious and ethnic community that actually began to accentuate and highlight the differences between the people of India and make them conscious to the concept of Communalism, another word that has ironically also been introduced to the literature of the subcontinent by the British and was not heard of before. However, more importantly, the early 20th century was the period when the concept of Nationalisms and Nation States was gaining increasing popularity among the intellectual masses of Europe, and through them, of India. Nationalism was being appropriated by the intelligentsia of the Indian subcontinent who were appropriating it in their own distinct ways. An excellent example of this endeavor can be gauged by V.D. Savarkar's Hindutva. Therefore, communities that had hitherto existed for centuries in an undivided India were now beginning to think of themselves as Nations. It was in such a climate that the Muslim League and Mohammad Ali Jinnah began to gradually warm themselves towards the idea of a separate Muslim Nation, for to them, the Muslims now constituted a Nation within a nation. It was this thrust of the innate distinctiveness of the Muslims of India that culminated in the partition of the Indian Subcontinent into the nation states of Pakistan and India. Hence, the concept of Islam became forever tied to Pakistan. Islam served as the crucible which served to glorify the history of Muslims in India to justify the existence of Pakistan, based on an opposition to Hinduism.

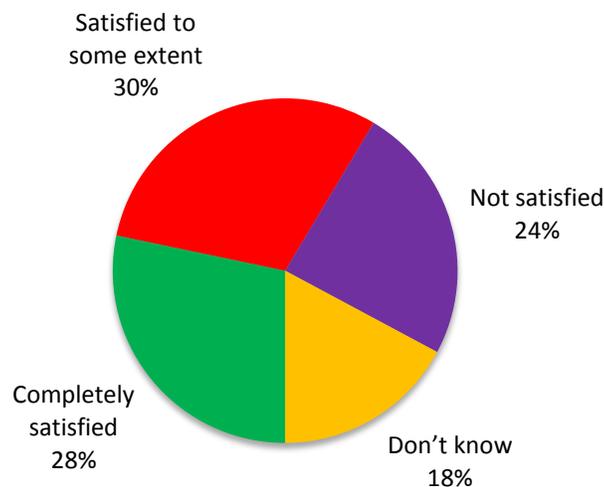
Furthermore, the historiography that developed post-partition also served only to justify the existence of Pakistan on the grounds of Islam, thus basing Pakistani Nationalism as Muslim Nationalism, and in the process, inevitably making Pakistan as a homeland only for the Muslims.

This rendering of Pakistani Nationalism has percolated its way into the dominant literature on the history of Pakistan. This can be seen in the way history textbooks on Pakistan are written and taught in academic institutions throughout the country. Written by nationalist historians, these histories tend to focus the history of the struggle for Pakistan on the state. The state is seen as the prime actor and is portrayed as the realization and the epitome of the Muslim struggle in India. Partition historiography therefore seems to be nothing beyond serving the Nation State and its interests. The Nation State of Pakistan is based on the Muslim experience in the Subcontinent and the identity of the Pakistani state is but an extension of the Muslim identity within India leading up to the Partition of the Subcontinent. This trend has thus caused the partition of India, an event of mammoth proportions and numerous layers, to

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become something of a taboo which can only be discussed in a specific way and under the auspices of the state, to serve as a promoter of its nationalist agenda. As Ayesha Jalal eloquently puts it; “apart from the complex nature of the subject, its continuing role in fanning inter- and intra-state tensions in contemporary South Asia has led historians to privilege the gloss of nationality rather more than the thrust of scholarship”.

Still staying on the subject of Pakistan’s history and its dissemination in academic literature, we now take a look at the empirical results of this following question that was put towards the respondents in the Partition Report 1947: “Are you satisfied with the syllabi of children’s history textbooks in schools?”

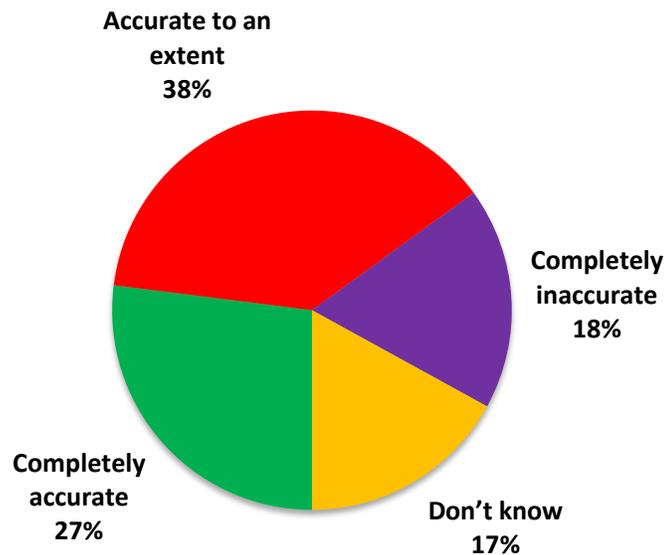


Source: Partition Report, conducted by Gallup Pakistan, Nov 30 - Dec 14, 2015

A majority of Pakistanis (58%) seem to be satisfied with what their children are reading in the history textbooks these days. Having previously highlighted the shortcomings and the biases that are inherent in the literature on the historiography of Pakistan, it is a tad bit saddening to see the satisfaction of Pakistanis regarding the history that is being taught to their children. Furthermore, on the question of the history of the partition, the respondents were asked the following question: “In your opinion how accurate do you think history textbooks in schools are with respect to the events that happened before, during and after partition?” In response to this question, (27%) of the respondents felt that history textbooks narrate the events of the partition with complete accuracy while another (38%) of the respondents felt that the historiography of the partition being written in the history textbooks of today

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was fairly accurate. In contrast, only (18%) of the respondents said that partition historiography in textbooks is completely inaccurate. A pie-chart below illustrates these empirical results.



Source: Partition Report, conducted by Gallup Pakistan, Nov 30 - Dec 14, 2015

An examination of some of these textbooks is therefore in order so as to problematize the empirical results present above. Some of the popular history textbooks being taught at the school and the college level are Ikram Rabbani and Monawwar Ali Syed's Introduction to Pakistan Studies. These books follow the similar pattern of equating the Pakistan movement with Islam. The History of Pakistan starts with the Muslim conquests of the lands of the subcontinent. Ironically, the most significant of these early Muslim conquests is considered, by these historians, to be the conquest of Sindh by Mohammad bin Qasim, though a more thorough and unbiased reading of history has proved that his conquests did not have as massive an impact as they are said to have in the historiography of Pakistan. However, these books are exalting Mohammad bin Qasim only because of the fact that they want to tie with origins of Pakistan somehow with Islam, to inculcate in their readers an equivocation of Islam with Pakistani Nationalism. Mohamad bin Qasim is therefore hailed as this saint-like figure that first brought Islam to the lands that would later become Pakistan. That is precisely what Nationalism does as well. It focuses on the past for its propaganda for the future is based more on real facts. That is because in the past, one

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can lie and choose at will while making up grand histories of ancestors and noble people.¹ For these historians then, Islam's coming to the subcontinent was the start of a natural process which resulted in the birth of Pakistan because Islam's values were superior to Hinduism which rested on the unethical caste system.

Furthermore, throughout various instances in the books, derogatory references are made to the Hindus showing them as essentially evil, scheming continuously against the Muslims to impose their culture and their religion on them. Thus, the efforts of the Muslims are portrayed by these historians as valiant responses towards the evil Hindu who was trying to make the Muslim subservient to him in a new India. Ayesha Jalal states that such a rendering of history as has been done in these books only ends up giving its readers with the single inevitable conclusion that the sole purpose of demanding a separate homeland for the Muslims was because Pakistan had to move towards becoming an Islamic State.² Therefore, in Pakistan's history, the Hindu becomes that imagined enemy against which all efforts are pitted. Thus, such a reading of the history of Pakistan only results in Pakistanis seeing India and Hindus as an enemy even today, thus rendering more legitimacy to the Pakistani State. This warped idea of Nationalism that is being taught in schools is regrettably only going to end up raising more mindless patriots and bigots. Therefore, such a state-centric narrative of Pakistan is very dangerous for the future of Pakistan as it renders the students of history in Pakistan unable to properly criticize themselves and their nation. No history book being taught at institutions will paint a true picture of, even of the Great Partition itself, and the violence that raged at the border provinces. The history books of Pakistan are silent at the mention of the events of August 25th, 1947, when the soldiers of the 3rd Baluch Regiment mercilessly butchered 3,000 Hindu and Sikh refugees in Sheikhupura, in West Pakistan, and incidentally, in the process, perpetrating one of the most gruesome acts of violence during partition.³ The history books tell only of the violence of the Hindus and Sikhs towards the Muslims, making out only the Muslims as the victims and martyrs of Pakistan. No one speaks of the horrors instigated by the Muslims as well with regards to cleansing its population from Non-Muslims in the aftermath of the partition. No history book will ever talk about the blood of Hindus and Sikhs living in Punjab and Sindh which was shed just so that a new state of Pakistan could be made. That will never happen because the dissemination of such literature will almost certainly be wiped out by the state, on the grounds of being anarchic and anti-Nationalistic.

¹ Urban, J. (1991). Nationalism as a Totalitarian Ideology. *Social Research*, vol. 58, No. 4, Nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe, 775-779.

² Jalal, A. (1995). Conjuring Pakistan: History as Official Imagining. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 73-89.

³ Chatterji, J. (2012). South Asian Histories of Citizenship 1946-1970. *The Historical Journal*, 1049-1071.

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Conclusion

The spewing of this hate material against the Hindus is only serving to engender greater intolerance among the people living in Pakistan towards the Hindus and the other minority groups, for in light of such scholarship written on Pakistan, these groups are only being seen as the people for whom Pakistan was never made. Regretful as it may be, the way Pakistani historiography is being written has to change. It needs to move away from and out of the shadow of the state with which it has been tainted since the partition of India and try and adopt a more objective, self-critical approach towards discussing Pakistan and the events that led to its formation rather than this material which only serves to drag its audience further into the chasm of intolerance based on religion. This totalitarian agenda of the state in purporting this point of view heralding Pakistan as the banner of Islam is beginning to do more harm to Pakistan than good. It is this marriage of Pakistan with Islam that has ended up causing Pakistan to be ravaged by internal discord and intolerance. It is an ideological problem and this pervading ideology of Pakistan needs to be questioned so that differing opinions and positions on Pakistan and the partition of the Indian subcontinent are brought forward and this discipline is able to become more academic and all-encompassing in nature, with a certain measure of objectivity restored.

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