



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Chapter 88; Looking beyond the radcliffe line

Ahmad, I.

Citation

Ahmad, I. (1997). Chapter 88; Looking beyond the radcliffe line. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/11851>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/11851>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Looking beyond the Radcliffe Line

IRFAN AHMAD*

Half a century is not a short span of time in the chequered history of a country like India or Pakistan, at least in terms of the liminal manifestations both the countries have witnessed structurally since 1947. The year nineteen nintyseven marks the completion of the golden jubilee of 'freedom' for Pakistan and India. Feverish preparations have already begun in both the countries to celebrate this historic of moment. Historic, it is indeed. But is it really a moment of freedom? Whom will this moment bring great verve and unbounded joy for? And who among us will really celebrate this occasion on both sides of the border?

We all know that a celebration is not a knee-jerk response. Neither is it a mere intellectual jolt. A spirited celebration always involves emotions, memories, inner stirrings, fears, values and sentiments over which we as discreet individuals do not exercise definite control. They are rather the product of the dynamic historical processes and titanic social upheavals which shape our mental landscape and condition the contours of our sensibility. Will the coming massive celebration then be in proper accordance with such memories? Emotions, dreams and histories? Perhaps not!

INVENTING AN ENEMY

The poignant experiences of the last fifty years constantly remind us of our collective amnesia and a consequent potential danger which is becoming more alarming with the passage of every day. This is the ever-mounting threat of another war hovering over India and Pakistan. And if the current mood is any indicator, it will become more pronounced as the internal public tremors acquire higher intensity, in both the countries at the time of the general elections. In India in fact the danger has already begun to assume that dimension. No more platitudes against the old Nehruvian enemy called poverty. Neither is there a clarion call to weed out

* The author is an M.A. student, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Source: *Mainstream*, May 11, 1996.

corruption and industrialise the rural sector. Nor is there any talk about the restructuring of Gandhi's villages. Pakistan-bashing in India and India-bashing in Pakistan have come to be the central concern cutting across all the major political formations. The only *mantra* to save India (from whom?) and thus usher her into the era of prosperity, that dominates today our mainstream media, both electronic and print, is the repeated exhortation to get ready for a nationalist war against Pakistan. Herein lies, so goes the popular argument, the panacea to all problems — within and without.

The scene is not different at all in Pakistan, I am now convinced. Probably we have not forgotten the last general elections there. How Mian Nawaz Sharief and Benazir Bhutto vied with one another in projecting himself/herself as the only political force to face the Indian 'onslaught' and ensure Pakistan's national security. Even a cursory look at Pakistan's popular magazines will show how prejudices and enchanting myths against India are manufactured, processed and meticulously injected. In Pakistan, for each disruption in the electric supply, for each collapse in the canal system, for each group fragmentation, ethnic or otherwise, the blame is squarely placed on India.

So does India. In order to project an innocent and clean image before the public, it must find an adversary who could easily be held responsible for the domestic frustrations and the popular protests as a consequence thereto. The BJP's serious charge that plague (in 1994) in Surat was consciously exported from Pakistan suffices to prove the ever-heightening anxiety of the ruling and contending elites on both sides of the border to pass the buck on the 'other'. Frenetic resort to nationalism in this specific backdrop is then nothing but sheer sham and thoroughly anti-people because herein Dalits, women and minorities who form the backbone of the Indian society, have no dignified place whatsoever.

MEDIA'S ROLE

And it is the media which manufacture, propagate and sustain such mutual hatred in both the countries whose ultimate victims are none but us — the young budding generation which is in no way responsible for whatever happened half-a-century ago. A look at the Indian newspapers will prove this beyond all shadow of doubt. In fact, there appears to be a clear endemic bias towards Pakistan. And precisely because of this, the killing of mere four persons in Sindh makes front-page often in box, news for Indian newspapers whereas the killing of even more than a dozen people in Bihar, Orissa or the North-East is played down by the same media. The role of the electronic media is more baffling. Almost everyday from the Urdu service of the All India Radio (at 3.30 PM) a bundle of lies, often in sweet feminine voice, is broadcast against Pakistan. The catastrophic ramification of this poisonous propaganda under the catchy titles of *Ek Mukhtasar Taqreer* (A Short Speech) and *Aaj ki Baat* (Talk of the Day) could be gauged from the fact that it is the young generation which primarily constitutes its audience. The morning news from All India Radio equally distorts facts.

In Pakistan too the media indulge in the same nefarious anti-India propaganda and inject repeated white lies in the minds of the gullible masses. Radio Pakistan

leaves no stone unturned to highlight the 'violation' of human rights in Kashmir and the 'brutality' perpetrated by the Indian security forces there. Over and above, it seizes every opportunity, whenever possible, to present Pakistan as the lone crusader of civility and human rights. So does Pakistan T.V. But Pakistan tends to forget, perhaps deliberately, her own track-record of suppression whose meek victims are sometimes the helpless Mohajreen, sometimes the ethnic groups in Sindh and sometimes the common citizens who while protesting for drinking water and electricity get everready bullets of the Pakistan Army. The print media also act in the same irresponsible way. *Takbeer International*, a reputed weekly, is a case in point. Other newspapers and magazines are not far different. In fact, they have launched a hate-campaign against India.

But this role of the media is not something unexpected and hence shocking. Anjum Niaz, the Pakistani journalist, is right in saying that "the national press of Pakistan and India are still tied to the apron strings of the powers-that-be". (*Mainstream*, November 18, 1995) Thus seen, the media shall but articulate the idioms and interests of the respective ruling elites on both sides of the border.

WAR ECONOMY

The real threat to cordial ties and peaceful coexistence between Pakistan and India, therefore, comes from the rootless elites on both sides of the border. It is they who after striking a deal with both the semi-feudal forces within and the neo-imperialist forces without, are today crying blue murder for nationalism — a cry which is at best a third-grade joke and at worst a complete farce. War in the name of the 'motherland' (nationalism) is what exactly conforms to the basic interests of the ruling elites. National unity and integrity in this specific context becomes a rallying point to score political mileage and conceal the internal tremors and rising domestic popular anger.

More importantly, under the facade of the country's security and safety, there runs a massive war economy, often invisible. Its account is never made public. It is not placed in Parliament for debate either. Because it is something which has to be kept secret and confidential in the interests of the nation's 'unity and safety'. The lethal weapons that India and Pakistan buy from the imperialist block are never accounted for. And it is anybody's guess as to who extracts more benefits out of such purchase of arms which are eventually turned against the very people the ruling elites claim to protect.

Consequently, the more the ruling elites in both the countries spend on arms, the more vehemently they espouse the cause of 'danger to the nation', the more will the common people on both sides of the border suffer. According to an assessment in Pakistan, the size of the army outnumbers of the size of teachers at all levels. The unbridled expenditure on arms and lethal weapons will thus automatically mean a drastic and heavy slash on the life-sustaining sectors such as health and education whose primacy need not be overemphasised for a poverty-ridden and backward country like Pakistan or India. The manufacturing cost of a missile, for example *Agni*, means depriving thousands of already hungry people of their basic food for

one full year, leave alone clothing and shelter, besides its resultant ecological catastrophe. And I am sure Pakistan's purchase of fighting aircraft and other destructive weapons from the United States or France equally deprives millions of mouths there of their daily bread. Mahbubul Haq, the noted Pakistani economist, has recently highlighted this ever increasing expenditure on defence and consequent neglect of social sectors, though from a different perspective.

TOWARDS A SHARED FUTURE

Such concern and anxiety of the intelligentsia notwithstanding, the expenditure on arms and defence will inevitably shoot up in the future in both the countries. Because it is the imperatives of governance of the elites on both sides of the border whose otherwise shaky position could be strengthened only by projecting a mutually antagonistic past. Jinnah cried hoarse for this exclusivist culture of the Muslims which to him was always at loggerheads with that of the Hindus. The BJP is today more pronounced and more antagonistic in its claims to such exclusivity and hostility. And this cannot be realised unless the history of shared sorrows and collective struggle of the common people is buried once and for all. But has it succeeded?

Ever since 1947, continuous attempts have been made to inject such atavistic feelings in the minds and hearts of the people in both India and Pakistan. And it has been systematically carried out by the respective states through their various institutions and modern mechanisms. But shared sentiments of togetherness and vibrant collective feel of united resistance which has a long history behind it, cannot be just washed away in one go. The exemplary composite culture of the subcontinent has survived countries such jingoistic attacks and communal upheavals. One of the finest expressions of such composite culture could be found in the domain of art and music. This is why Mehdi Hassan's *ghazals* are as popular in India as Lata Mangeshkar's songs are in Pakistan. And their beauty and sweetness majestically reign the hearts of million who plough in the field, work in the factories and study in the universities.

The mighty tanks rolling along the border on both the sides and the huge barbed wires artificially erected along the Radcliffe Line by the ruling elites of India and Pakistan have not been able to forestall the popular flow of this great sense of the composite ethos and shared emotions. The future of the common masses on both sides of the border, therefore, lies in the collective struggle against their respective elites. It is they who are the real impediment on the way to a shared future. Deeply anguished by the Indo-Pak war of 1965, Ali Sardar Jafri, the famous Urdu poet and a shining symbol of the composite culture of the subcontinent, in his moving poem *Kaun Dushman Hai?* (Who is the Enemy?) beautifully captures this reality:

Tum aao gulshan-e-Lahore se chaman bardosh

Ham aaen subh-e-Banaras ki roshni lekar

Hemalya ke hawaon ki taazgi lekar

Aur us ke baad ye poochen ke kaun dushman hai?