



Debunking the Myth: The Fraudulence of the Two-Nation Theory and Ideological Engineering

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Abstract:

This research analyses the Two-Nation Theory, which was the ideological basis for partitioning British India in 1947. The author argues that it was not an inevitable outcome of history but rather a politically driven construct needing ideological engineering. By investigating the socio-cultural unity of the Indian subcontinent before the partition, it is shown how colonial policies, elite politics, and communal narratives manufactured religious nationalism. It is apparent from historical records, political speeches, and even recently published post-colonial critiques that this theory ignored the actual pluralism of Indian society, imposing a politically expedient binary divide instead. Furthermore, this paper explores the theory's enduring consequences, particularly how it justifies exclusionary identities while suppressing shared cultural, historical, and cross-identity multi-layered realities. This research aims to debunk and untangle the mythologized pedestal the Two-Nation Theory rests upon, exposing the consequences of identity-based political engineering on post-colonial nation-states.

Keywords: Two-Nation Theory, Partition of India, Ideological Engineering, Religious Nationalism, Post-Colonial Perspective

Uncovering composite culture in medieval India: A historical and cultural exploration

The ideological basis for the partition of British India in 1947 was furnished by Syed Ahmed Khan's Two-Nation Theory, advanced later by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The theory suggested Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations constituting an irreconcilable political and cultural split, thus advocating for a separate Muslim homeland. It certainly influenced the politics of the subcontinent, but, to this day, it remains intensely contested from intellectual, political and social perspectives. I argue that the Two Nation Theory was not so much an expression of Muslim identity as it was a politically calculated strategy employed during the waning phase of colonial rule. This study seeks to challenge its legitimacy and moral foundations by analysing its dominant assumptions, namely, disregard for intra-Muslim diversity and the neglect of varying socio-political contexts and critiquing its enduring socio-political repercussions. The India-Pakistan conflicts are often framed through conflict laden approaches dominated by the Two Nation Logic. Challenging this requires exposing layers underlying what is termed 'historical fraud' amidst counter-narratives to established ones. This research is intended to address the concept's misunderstandings through a multi-layered historical, colonial, and post-colonial perspective, and more broadly inform understandings of the partition of the subcontinent.

The history of pre-modern India presents a rich mixture of engagement by different communities in which religion was only one of many markers of identity. The Islamic incursions into the Indian subcontinent, commencing with the Turks and the conquest of Lahore in 1021 and culminating in the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in 1192, have been understood in a purely religious way. However, based on a variety of contemporary evidence, including medieval inscriptions in Sanskrit identifying the invaders as "Turushka" or "Turks," suggest that ethnic and linguistic identifiers were more salient than religious identifiers (Asher & Talbot, 2006). While there were acts of violence and temple destruction in the course of these invasions, the invaders began to assimilate with the local populations in the course of time, producing an Indo-Islamic civilization.

This fusion was not limited to architecture or art but permeated language, spirituality, and everyday life. Hybrid vernaculars such as Deccani and Urdu emerged, blending Indic and Persianate linguistic elements (Eaton, 2000). Sufi mystics, central to the spread of Islam in the subcontinent, often acknowledged the spiritual value of Hindu texts and practices. Some Sufis adopted yogic postures and rituals, underscoring a lived syncretism where religious boundaries blurred in the context of shared local traditions (Ernst, 2005). It was

not uncommon for Muslims to pray at Hindu shrines and Hindus to visit Sufi dargahs. Notably, some South Indian texts even depicted the Sultan of Delhi as a manifestation of Vishnu, reflecting a remarkable flexibility in religious symbolism (Chatterjee, 1993).

The Mughal period further illustrates this syncretic ethos. Prince Dara Shikoh's translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads* into Persian in *Majma-ul-Bahrain* ("The Confluence of Two Oceans") aimed to highlight the spiritual commonalities between Hinduism and Islam. His efforts were not isolated. Later emperors like Bahadur Shah Zafar continued to express an inclusive vision of faith. Even in the militaristic realm, the boundaries of religious affiliation were porous. Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha Empire, included Muslim commanders in his army, while the Mughal forces were heavily reliant on Hindu Rajput generals. These examples reveal that the dynamics of alliance and conflict were driven more by pragmatism than by religious ideology.

Such patterns persisted into the 18th century. The Peshwas of the Maratha Confederacy maintained Muslim contingents in their private armies, while Muslim soldiers and generals served in Hindu polities such as Vijayanagara. The participation of Muslim commanders in the campaigns of Hindu rulers like Maharana Pratap during the Battle of Haldighati challenges the simplistic portrayal of medieval conflicts as binary religious wars. Shared regional cultures and occupational networks often overrode confessional divides. For instance, a Sunni Muslim weaver in Bengal would have more in common—linguistically, culturally, and gastronomically—with his Hindu neighbour than with a Shia merchant from western India (Bayly, 1999). Until the nineteenth century, regional, linguistic, and cultural identities were far more salient than religious distinctions in shaping social life.

However, the advent of colonial rule marked a turning point in this historically layered coexistence. British administrators, particularly through the census and legal apparatus, began classifying Indians primarily on the basis of religious identity (Dirks, 2001). This bureaucratic essentialization of difference reified religious boundaries and gradually eroded the syncretic social fabric that had characterized much of India's past. By linking religious identity to political representation—especially under the frameworks of communal electorates and colonial legal codification—the British state created new incentives for communal consolidation and competition (Pandey, 1990). The colonial discourse thus introduced and institutionalized a form of communalism that was largely absent in pre-colonial society.

This historical reflection invites a rethinking of the rigid communal binaries often associated with Indian history, particularly in relation to the Two-Nation Theory. It compels scholars to revisit the deep historical roots of cultural plurality and question the notion that religious difference in India has always been a source of division. Rather, as this analysis demonstrates, India's past was marked by fluid, overlapping identities that resisted easy categorization until they were systematically codified by colonial rule.

Colonial mapping of partition: Divide and rule policy

India's pluralistic society was much more delineated according to region, language, and occupation than on a strictly religious footing until the end of the 19th century. Across the sub-continent, communities, be they Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian, found much commonality in how they expressed cultural idioms, language(s), rituals, and even spiritual practices. While religion of course featured within the broader context of their social identity, it acted as an arbitrary divide between communities. Yet, religious identity's 'syncretic' existence began to falter when it was perceived, outlined, presented, and ultimately carved on the basis of the nature of colonialism as it intersected with a set of social and discursive projects had changed the terms of place, space, and identity.

British colonial governance didn't depend only on military strength, but also on epistemic control, which involved defining and classifying the rich complex social landscape of India into a set of rigid taxonomies. It was Stewart (1951) who pointed to British practices as part of a colonial strategy of "divide and rule," which meant breaking up India's population along religious, ethnic, and regional lines. In this process, the British created communal electorates, codified personal laws, and initiated identity-based census practices to engage religions as the principal identity for the Indian people. The British created modes of religious essentialism which, drawing on older patterns of fluid interaction between different communities, developed more permanent roles for Hindus and Muslims as individuals under the changeless unity of religious identities. This was most explicitly articulated in the British policies such as the 1905 Partition of Bengal, which was widely read as a colonial effort to hinder nationalist mobilization by splitting Hindus and Muslims (Stewart, 1951).

The colonial state's statistical and administrative apparatus particularly the decennial census played a critical role in this transformation. As Bernard Cohn and Nicholas Dirks argue, colonialism was not just a territorial enterprise but a cultural project that sought to redefine the "native" through state-generated categories. Religious identity became a bureaucratic fixed point, replacing the fluid and context-driven modes

of belonging that had prevailed for centuries (Dirks, 2001). Consequently, individuals were no longer seen as part of overlapping regional, linguistic, or occupational networks but were increasingly defined by their religious community.

This shift from cultural plurality to communal rigidity laid the groundwork for the eventual partition of British India in 1947. Faisal Devji (2013), in *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea*, argues that the idea of Pakistan was less a product of historical Islamic unity and more a modernist political strategy to safeguard Muslim identity within a Western nation-state framework. Unlike narratives that treat partition as the inevitable outcome of entrenched Hindu-Muslim hostility, Devji frames it as a strategic reimagining of Muslim political identity under colonial modernity. Pakistan, in his view, was conceptualised not solely as a geographical homeland but as a Muslim "Zion", a political experiment inspired by European nationalism rather than Islamic orthodoxy.

Devji's reading disrupts the standard way of thinking about Muhammad Ali Jinnah as a communal demagogue. Rather, he reads Jinnah as one in a lineage of modernist politicians attempting to reconcile the nature of Muslim identity with democratic self-rule. To Devji, Jinnah envisioned a constitutional state, not a theocratic one, in which Muslims would have civil liberties and political powers. Likewise, Jalal (1985) notes that Jinnah's initial focus was on securing constitutional guarantees in a united India, rather than calling for a separate Muslim state. It was only after the Indian National Congress and the colonial countered the majority of these demands, time and again, that the Muslim League shifted the demands from a proposal, to a categorical demand for a separate state altogether.

Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman* also partners critiques of colonialism with critiques of colonial complicity in solidifying communal divisions. By supporting the Muslim League's demands for separate electorates, along with acknowledging their demands via recognition as a legitimate, exclusive representative of Indian Muslims, the British state, equipped with sovereign power, contributed to the solidification of religious identity as the primary axis of political bargaining. Jalal argues that the Lahore Resolution of 1940, far from being a spontaneous eruption of communal feeling, was the result of more complex interactions between colonial policy, Congress's rigidity, and Muslim political aspirations.

Other scholars have invoked and widened this colonial critique. Sunil Khilnani (1997), for instance, argues in his book *The Idea of India* that pre-existing socio-religious tensions would become harnessed by both colonial and indigenous communal politics. Specifically, movements such as the Arya Samaj's Shuddhi

campaign, rooted in cultural revivalism, and the Hindi-Urdu debate would further polarize Hindu-Muslim relations. Khilnani suggests that cultural activities, although cultural as opposed to political, utilized an indigenous colonialism to actively divide Hindus and Muslims.

Two leaders, two nations: Nehru, Jinnah and the road to partition

However, attributing the partition purely to British interference would be too simplistic. Internal political conflicts, weaknesses in leadership, and ideological cleavages were also part of the equation. Kumawat (2018) emphasizes the dual, competing responsibility of Nehru and Jinnah, whose visions for the future of postcolonial India frequently changed and conflicted with each other and had no chance for compromise. The Congress Party imagined a centralized secular democracy, but the Muslim League understood that this was not an adequate, effective way to protect minority rights.

Ambedkar's Pakistan or the Partition of India presents a distinctive Dalit approach to the communal question. Unlike the Congress and the Muslim League, who processed the needs of minorities within majoritarian equations, Ambedkar criticized both. He accepted the creation of Pakistan not because of religion, but as a practical solution to a political problem that seemed impossible to resolve. His rationale was based on socio-political realism rather than the metaphysics of the Two-Nation Theory. Ambedkar contended neither Congress's romantic nationalism nor the League's religious nationalism considered the structural inequalities that plagued India's minorities.

Roderick Matthews (2012) provides a comparative treatment of two divergent approaches to Indian nationhood in Jinnah vs. Gandhi. Gandhi sought to establish a pluralist spiritual republic, based on ahimsa and cooperative community, whereas Jinnah's approach constructed a legal-political framework based on group rights. Matthews illustrated how both leaders deployed religious identities as means of political mobilization, notwithstanding that their political objectives were distinct.

Ultimately, the British colonial project expedited the process of religion moving from social practice to political identity. This articulation of religious identity was fed by strategic interventions by the state, but also related to indigenous political calculations that sought to denote the independent role of religion in political identity. The initial articulation of a religious identity laid the groundwork for the partition of India, but partition was never inevitable, nor was it a colonial conclusion of divide-and-rule. Partition existed in the context of possible modern ideologies, strategic miscalculations and a failure to develop a collective, non-sectarian version of Indian pluralism. These specific strands of thought reiterated can shed more light on the

contingencies of partition, not as an inevitable rupture but a made possible tragedy, produced through imperial design and indigenous dissonance.

The colonial strategy of developing political identities along religious lines didn't only constitute pre-partition politics - and had a large impact on the post-colonial context as well. The Two-Nation Theory, which had originally been used to justify the partition of India, faced a considerable early challenge within a generation of Pakistan's creation. Nowhere was the tenuousness of this theory more revealed than in the case of East Pakistan's secession and birth of Bangladesh in 1971.

The birth of Bangladesh: A rebuttal to the Two-Nation Theory

The rise of Bangladesh was not caused by a religious schism both East and West Pakistan were immediately identifiable as overall Muslim societies but by deepening estrangement based in linguistic, cultural and economic discrimination. The inability of the state to manage the cultural identity of Bengalis, most notably the language, led to a massive nationalist movement whereby Bengali linguistics prioritised and rejected the logic of religious unity. The purporting of Urdu as the only national language of Pakistan, and greater political and economic deficit in disregard to East Pakistan, evoked deep resentment in East Pakistan and revealed divisions in the type of unity that the state sought to promulgate. (Rashiduzzaman, 1970; van Schendel, 2009)

This shift marked a significant post-colonial moment where religion could no longer suffice as the singular foundation of national identity. As Ayesha Jalal (1995) asserts, the Two-Nation Theory's premise that Muslims form a homogeneous political community was undercut by Pakistan's own inability to manage ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversity within its borders. The eventual breakdown between East and West Pakistan proved that the homogenizing impulse of religious nationalism was not only politically inadequate but dangerously dismissive of sub-national pluralism.

While some argue that Bangladesh's decision not to rejoin Hindu-majority India after independence confirms that religious identity remained central to its nationhood, such a reading oversimplifies the complexity of nationalist motivations. Bangladesh's emergence was not a return to pre-partition secular nationalism but a rearticulation of Muslim identity through a cultural-linguistic lens. Devji (2013) suggests that the formation of Pakistan, and later the fragmentation of its unity, must be understood not simply as a series of religious events, but as manifestations of modernist political projects each shaped by distinct socio-political contexts rather than a uniform Islamic vision.

Altaf Hussain, the exiled leader of Pakistan's Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), remains a vocal critic of the Two-Nation Theory. He argues that if the theory held true, Muslims would have migrated en masse to Pakistan in 1947 rather than remain in India. More importantly, he views the creation of Bangladesh as a categorical rejection of the notion that religion alone can be the bedrock of state formation. Instead, the political, linguistic, and regional grievances that led to Bangladesh's independence are reminders of the multidimensional nature of identity in South Asia.

Post-colonial scholars have continued to critique the reductive logic of the Two-Nation Theory by drawing attention to the internal fissures it failed to anticipate. Christophe Jaffrelot (2002) and Adeel Khan (2005) contend that Pakistan's internal fragmentation whether in the form of Baloch, Sindhi, or Pashtun ethnic nationalism demonstrates the failure of a state built on religious majoritarianism to offer equitable political representation to its diverse constituents. The same theory that claimed to unify all South Asian Muslims could not prevent internal discord once exposed to the everyday politics of region, ethnicity, and culture. In this light, the partition and its theoretical foundation must be understood not just as a colonial consequence but as a cautionary tale of how modern nation-states struggle to balance unity with diversity. Partha Chatterjee (1993) reminds us that nationalism, especially in post-colonial contexts, often entails selective readings of history, memory, and identity to build a narrative of coherence. Yet, as seen in both India and Pakistan, such narratives are continually contested from within.

The experience of partition, and its echoes in the post-colonial period, reflect how the colonial legacy is compounded by indigenous political failure. The failure of post-colonial states to manage pluralism in ways analogous to colonial modes of categorising communities, heads of state and, ultimately, citizens fuels exclusion, violence, and instability. In both Pakistan and India minorities are still marginal, whether through direct acts of persecution, cultural invisibility or political under-representation.

The Bangladesh liberation war is both a break and a disclosure. It broke the illusion that religion could solely be the anchor for a stable polity, and it revealed that there is an ongoing work to be done to establish national identities around an inclusive, pluralistic, and context-specific basis. Ultimately the post-colonial critique of the Two-Nation Theory must move beyond rejecting the theory as a way of thinking, but must engage with its epistemic shortcomings, its essentialist identities, its erasure of cultures that shared histories, and its apathy towards internal pluralism.

The dissolution of Pakistan in 1971 and the subsequent emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state presented a significant challenge to the conceptual foundation of the Two-Nation Theory. Based on the claim that the Muslims of South Asia represented a distinct nation in want of a separate state, the Two-Nation Theory did not adequately take into account the deep-seated divisions within Pakistan itself especially between the ethnolinguistic Bengalis of East Pakistan and their Urdu-speaking political elites in West Pakistan. Even if both wings of the state shared a majority Muslim population, the ecological, cultural, linguistic and political distinctions were not easily reconciled.

Bengali nationalism emerged as the most potent political movement in East Pakistan, promoting linguistic identity, cultural heritage, and regional autonomy, rather than religious similarity. It wasn't until academics like Willem van Schendel (2009) and Sarmila Bose (2011) illuminated the 1971 conflict, that we come to understand that language, regional biases, and political exclusion rather than religious difference, were the driving forces behind secession. Bengali leaders, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder of the Awami League, were able to garner support not based on Islamic solidarity, but based on the reaction to the perceived cultural exploitation and economic exploitation of East Pakistan by a Punjabi- dominated West Pakistan.

The creation of Bangladesh marked a significant moment in South Asian history one that cast serious doubt on the viability of religion as the sole basis for nationhood. As Altaf Hussain and many critics have argued, if Islam alone were sufficient to bind disparate communities into a coherent national entity, Pakistan's unity would not have fractured so violently (Hussain, 2003). Instead, the brutal military crackdown in East Pakistan, the refusal to honour democratic mandates, and the prioritization of West Pakistani interests laid bare the limitations of a political project founded predominantly on religious identity.

Yet, the birth of Bangladesh does not constitute a wholesale rejection of Islamic identity. Rather, it underscores the multiplicity of identities within the Muslim world and the significance of cultural and regional factors in nation-building. Scholars such as Ian Talbot (2005) have argued that Bangladesh's emergence reflects the failure of the Pakistani state to accommodate the pluralism inherent within its Muslim population. Unlike the assumptions underpinning the Two-Nation Theory, the Bengali case illustrated that intra-Muslim diversities linguistic, cultural, and political were potent enough to demand separate national recognition. Importantly, Bangladesh did not rejoin Hindu-majority India after secession, nor did it abandon its Islamic heritage. Instead, it carved out a distinct national identity that synthesized its Muslim majority status with

Bengali cultural pride and a secular constitutional framework. This dual identity reflects what Faisal Devji (2013) terms the “fragmentation of Muslim nationalism” a phenomenon where Islamic identity is no longer monolithic or territorially bound, but intersected by regional, ethnic, and linguistic affiliations. The Bangladesh example thus reaffirms that while religious identity may form part of national consciousness, it is insufficient on its own to sustain a viable, inclusive state.

The internal contradictions that emerged post-1947 within Pakistan served to expose yet again the vulnerability of a country based on a simplified notion of a religious binary. Internal contradictions across tensions such as alleged Punjabi dominance, the disenfranchisement of Baloch and Sindhi populations, and increased sectarian strife, demonstrated how structural problems were supplied and exacerbated by these contradictions ultimately stemming from a founding ideology. Ayesha Jalal (1995) pointed to the early mobilization of support by the Muslim League only made possible by the colonial situation and anxiety about a majoritarian Hindu government, not a coherent approach regarding what governance in the postcolonial context meant. Once the colonial power was removed, the unresolved tensions caused by contradictions became apparent.

Further, the Two-Nation Theory neglected the subcontinent's long and rich history of pluralism and inter-communal engagement. As we saw in the earlier discussion, for centuries, Indian society existed through overlapping identities in which language, locality, and livelihood were often more significant than formal religious boundaries. In failing to accommodate this complexity, the theory produced exclusionary and undemocratic practices in Pakistan, such as its declaration of Urdu as the sole national language while ignoring the demands of the Bengali-speaking majority. When the state refused to accommodate the region's linguistic and geographic diversities, it undermined its nascent nationhood's legitimacy.

Thus, the events of 1971, reflect not only a challenge to the Two-Nation theory, but perhaps a re-examination of the very essence of modern statehood in the South Asian region. As historian Venkat Dhulipala (2015) has noted, the ideological imagination of Pakistan was never monolithic; rather, it was a contested space in which divergent visions of modernity, governance and religion were imagined by various actors. Hence, the secession of Bangladesh represented not just the fracturing of a political apparatus but also the ideological demise of an experiment in reducing religious and civic identity into the notion of nationhood, without undertaking to understand the complexities of identity and belonging in a layered manner.

Essentially, the formation of Bangladesh reaffirms an important historical lesson that nation building in the subcontinent and anywhere else, for that matter requires more than a shared faith. It requires the inclusion of all peoples in governance, sensitivity to regional autonomy, and a respect for cultural diversity. In a region where religious identities intermingle with complicated social realities, the Bangladesh experience serves as a powerful counter-narrative against essentialist ideologies such as the Two-Nation Theory, and presents an alternative and lasting argument for pluralist nationalism based on democratic and cultural plurality.

Historical distortion, selective memory, and ideological construction in Pakistani textbooks: A critical analysis

The ideological consequences of Partition not only shaped the geopolitics of the region but also reshaped the historical imagination of the new states. This is nowhere more evident than in the historiographical practices inherent in the education system of Pakistan. The state of Pakistan attempted to contextualize its history as recently as 1971, a full twenty-four years after its founding. While acknowledging this lapse as rooted in the transitory anxieties of statehood, it is worth noting that once East Pakistan fell away from the "motherland," the state recognized a need for a more unified national identity. This need could only be met with the selective construction of collective national history imbued with the ideological underpinnings of the Two-Nation Theory. Education, in particular through school curricula, served as an essential tool of this ideological project.

In 2003, Nayyar and Salim conducted a pivotal study of the national curriculum and content of textbooks for the SDPI. It was revealed in this amazing study that many textbooks begin the story of how Pakistan begins not from the independence movements in the 20th century as anti-colonial subjects, instead, trace the origins of Pakistan back to the 8th century (through the Arab invasion of Muhammad bin Qasim in 712 AD). These individuals have anchored the historical origins of the nation in 712 AD, and the clear purpose of doing so is to initiate the Islamization of the history of Pakistan, and as such then sever the narratives of genesis from the sub-continental history of resisting colonialism. Placing this kind of historiography is a denial of the past for centuries embracing a pluralistic, syncretic past when they instead want to promote an Islamic civilizational identity that affirms and reproduces an extension of the binary approach of the Two-Nation Theory.

The implications of this approach are far-reaching. The narratives that depict Muslims as perpetual victims of Hindu oppression and posit Hindus as naturally contentious establish the communal identities. By using the language of "Hindu betrayal", "Hindu cunning", and "Hindu animosity", as reported by the International Crisis Group (2007), school textbooks, and particularly history textbooks, establish the ideological premises that cohabitation was impossible; indeed, the concept of Hindus as crafty traitors and Hindus as pernicious fiends can only go so far in enhancing our understanding of South Asian "Hindu" history (Said 1978). These discourses are not simply a neutralized re-telling of history; they serve as devices to engender and sustain an inherently exclusionary national consciousness that legitimizes its existence on the vilification of the "Other" to constitute the self.

The National Curriculum of Pakistan (2006) clearly outlines the purpose of education as the development of an Islamic identity, calling the nation a "fort of Islam". This obsession maps not just onto education in the area of religious instruction, but also into the teaching of history, geography, and literature, which climate the relationship between religion education and civic education. As Rubina Saigol (2003) argues, the pedagogy used in teaching to promote Islam, moves it from a spiritual frame of reference to an instrument of politics that conditions students' learning to equate Pakistani identity with Islamic purity, while ignoring the realities of pluralism that grounded the religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity of historically ruled regions.

This ideological filtering also alters representations of important individuals in the Indian independence movement. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the father of Indian nationalism and a proponent of interreligious cooperation, is frequently written about in Pakistani textbooks as an unscrupulous person who used symbols of religion to further Hindu political purposes. Rosser (2003) stated that Gandhi often is blamed for communalizing Indian politics through his use of Hindu imagery as in cow protection, and Ram Rajya, without acknowledging his unwavering calls for communal unity; his advocacy for minority rights; or his hunger strikes in protest against anti-Muslim violence during Partition. The representations of Gandhi rob him of the richness of human history and reductively portray him as representative of Hindu hegemony.

The Indian National Congress (INC), too, is misrepresented. Rather than being portrayed as a broad-based nationalist movement inclusive of leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and others, the INC is depicted in many Pakistani textbooks as a Hindu-centric organization determined to undermine Muslim aspirations. A 9th-grade Pakistan Studies textbook issued by the Punjab Textbook Board

claims: “*The Indian National Congress worked merely for the rights of Hindus and always opposed Muslim demands. It never accepted Muslims as a separate nation.*” Such narratives erase the layered and contested realities of the freedom movement, simplifying history into a moralistic binary.

This politicization of history extends beyond individuals to entire movements. The Khilafat Movement, a joint Hindu-Muslim anticolonial campaign, is often cited in Pakistani textbooks as an example of Congress duplicity claiming that Gandhi “used” Muslims to further Hindu interests and then “abandoned” them (Punjab Textbook Board, 2009). What these narratives omit, however, is the complex nature of the Khilafat struggle as both a religious and anti-imperialist movement, and Gandhi’s sincere efforts to create a common anti-British platform through shared political vocabulary, even when such efforts were risky and controversial within his own ranks (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2012).

As historian Ayesha Jalal (1995) has noted, these distortions are not accidental but deliberate attempts to entrench a majoritarian Muslim identity that serves the political goals of the post-colonial state. By narrating Pakistan’s history through a lens of victimhood and perpetual civilizational conflict, the state reinforces the belief that partition was not only necessary but divinely ordained a completion of historical destiny rather than a tragic rupture. The irony, however, lies in how this ideology also silences the diverse Muslim experiences of the subcontinent, particularly those who rejected the Two-Nation framework and chose to remain in India.

In recent years, authors like Yaqoob Khan Bangash (2015) have stressed the need for decolonized, pluralist histories in Pakistan, which include the contributions of non-Muslims, question essentialist binaries, and recognize the shared histories of South Asia. This approach is more historically competent, and necessary for developing generations who can engage positively with pluralism regionally and globally.

To sum up, the historiographical interventions contained in Pakistan’s textbooks reveal the development of the Two-Nation Theory from a political claim, to an ideological orthodoxy. In creating a singular identity through the marginalization of competing narratives, the state is able to produce a particular kind of popular collective memory that still informs our common national consciousness, intergenerational memories, and orientations toward foreign policy objects. Therefore, if South Asia is to move to a place of some sense of reconciliation and peace, its citizenship has to critically reevaluate how we choose to teach history, and why.

Conclusion: Re-conceptualizing the two-nation theory in light of historical complexity

This study has systematically articulated the Two-Nation Theory, and more than simply as a political doctrine (concept), but as a political ideology constructed through elite fears, colonial policies of compliance, and selective uses of political history. Far from being an authentic or popular form of articulating Muslim desires throughout South Asia, the theory was utilized perhaps as a political manifesto by a segment of the Muslim elite, particularly the All-India Muslim League, to gain and hold sway during a time of both increased communal violence and decreased control from the imperial authority (Jalal, 1995; Devji, 2013).

Rather than reflecting the plural, fluid identities of Muslims in British India who were divided by region, language, sect, and class the theory simplified a complex social reality into a binary logic of irreconcilable religious identities. As such, it obscured the historically documented syncretism of Indian society, in which communities frequently overlapped and coexisted across religious lines (Metcalf & Metcalf, 2012). As argued by Khilnani (1997), the notion that religious identity could serve as a sufficient basis for political nationhood ignored the myriad forms of cultural, linguistic, and regional solidarities that often proved more salient in daily life.

The paper has also demonstrated that the legitimacy of the Two-Nation Theory did not hold up under the pressures of realpolitik and postcolonial nation-building. The secession of East Pakistan in 1971, giving rise to the Bengali Muslim-majority state of Bangladesh, decisively challenged the theory's core assumption that religion alone could bind a nation together. As Devji (2013) and Jalal (2000) point out, the events of 1971 revealed that linguistic and cultural affinities often outweighed shared religious identity in shaping national consciousness.

Further, the persistence of a large and politically active Muslim population in post-partition India, many of whom consciously chose not to migrate, underscores the inherent flaw in imagining Indian Muslims as a monolithic political community (Matthews, 2012). These communities continue to contribute meaningfully to Indian democracy, culture, and public life—an outcome that directly contradicts the deterministic logic of the Two-Nation Theory.

Looking into state-sponsored historiography and education curricula in Pakistan, particularly post-1971, underscores a significant attempt to uphold the ideological basis of partition through selective memory-making of the past and demonizing the Other. Textbooks, as evidence shows by Nayyar and Salim (2003) and Rosser (2003), are one way that the binary of the Hindu-Muslim divide persists, keeping alive the fears that fed the

original partition. This ideological rigidity does not only hinder cohesion internally in Pakistan, but the possibilities of meaningful reconciliation with India.

Thus, this study makes the case that the Two-Nation Theory is historically unsubstantiated and morally indefensible. Its promotion has created cycles of exclusion, distrust and violence, on both sides of the border, which undermined inclusive political communities in favour of a narrow form of ethno-religious nationalism, one that has a significant implication for the marginalization of minorities. As Ambedkar (1945) cautioned, communalism undermines the foundations of democratic nationhood, regardless of whether it pursues communal 'majoritarian' or 'minoritarian' strivings.

The refutation of the Two-Nation Theory is taken to be more than a scholarly exercise—it is a necessary step in reframing shared futures in South Asia. Given the region's colonial past and its postcolonial entanglements, it is essential to critically re-think the ideas that went into making its divisions happen. Why does moving forward require us to do anything other than establish political diplomacy as the norm in South Asia? Moving forward demands more than diplomatic engagements, it demands a collective political will for historical honesty and educational reform, as well as a political lexicon based on plurality, justice, and human dignity.

If the Two-Nation Theory is invoked uncritically or conveniently deployed for political purposes or downplayed as a state discourse, it will continue to overshadow India-Pakistan relations. Similarly, any notion of peace based on constructs of an eternal difference will suffer the same fate. Peace must be nurtured in the common ground of shared histories, difference in mutual vulnerability, and communal interest in coexistence. Thus, an authentic rethinking of the Theory's legacy is not about unwriting history, but rethinking the future.

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