THE INDIA FORUM
A JOURNAL-MAGAZINE ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

May 28, 2025

Defining Pakistan

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Questions about how the Pakistani state would be defined and who could legitimately claim citizenship within it were intensely debated in the early years of the new nation.

Upon its creation, Pakistan, like other modern states, needed a national anthem. An anthem would form an affective bond between the newly minted state and its citizens, allowing them to express their faith in its continued existence and loyalty towards it. But the process of choosing an anthemâ??its tune, content, and languageâ??was far from straightforward and took seven long years. The debates ranged from whether Pakistan, an Islamic country, even needed an anthem; to what language the lyrics would be written in, since Urdu and Bengali were vying for the status of the national language. The anthem that was eventually adopted in 1954, written by Hafeez Jallandhari, drew fierce criticism for being in Persianised Urdu, which was inaccessible to the large majority of Pakistanâ??s population.

These debates reveal much about the engagement between the state and the public in defining the contours of the republic and fostering a sense of national belonging in early postcolonial Pakistan. This is one of many instances of citizen-making and its relationship to national belonging recounted in Ali Usman Qasmiâ??s *Qaum, Mulk, Sultanat*, a deeply researched and engaging intellectual history of a critical period of Pakistanâ??s early history. Citizenship matters. This is apparent now more than ever as states pull up the drawbridges and seek to redefine the basis of both citizenship and national belonging. But what do these terms mean and how are they related? How does the state coopt the nation, its memory, and its cultural baggage, in the process of creating a sense of national belonging? Not only does Qasmi unpack these terms and answer these questions, but he also explains why, however cynical we might feel towards the state, its national anthem, flag, and other such appurtenances command an immense power over us, readying us to sacrifice our very lives if called upon to do so.

> How does the state coopt the nation, its memory, and its cultural baggage, in the process of creating a sense of national belonging?

In the case of South Asia, most scholarship on constitution-making and its corollary, citizenship, has focused on the Indian model. Scholarship on Pakistanâ??s transition from colonial subjecthood to postcolonial citizenship, especially in the period between 1947 and 1956 when it adopted a constitution, is sparse. And, yet, this period was critical in determining how the Pakistani state would be defined and who could legitimately claim citizenship within it. A study of the Pakistani state not only adds to the scholarship on postcolonial citizenship in general, but more particularly to the scholarship on the idea of Muslim *qaumiyyat* and its manifold imaginings. *Qaumiyyat* and its multiple meanings became central to Pakistanâ??s transition from the abstract idea of nation rooted in Hindustan to an equally abstract legal entity.

Placing Islam

The central concern of the Pakistan movement in the late colonial period continued into the early postcolonial as it grappled with whether it was to be a Muslim homeland â?? where the cultural identity and socio-political interests of Muslims would be protected â?? or an Islamic republic, where Muslims could establish â??an idealized pious republicâ?• (36). While the latter idea ultimately won out, Qasmi argues that this was far from a foregone conclusion.

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Further, since both ideas were built around privileging the religious identity of Muslimness â?? even though the former was more inclusive than the latter â?? the question of whether it was possible to achieve political equality regardless of religious affiliation remained. After all, Pakistan was created on the basis of the Hindu-Muslim divide, which meant that unless it was to invalidate the very basis of its existence, minorities could not be recognised as politically equal citizens. *Qaum, Mulk, Sultanat* meticulously details the debates and controversies surrounding this fundamental question, which explain the delay in adoption of a constitution in Pakistan.

Beginning in December 1949, the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan faced the uphill task of deciding on whom to confer Pakistani citizenship. In both case, Pakistan and India, the question of citizenship hinged on the Partition refugee â?? which was rendered into a legal category â?? and to a lesser extent the diaspora across the British Empire. Although India did not pass a comprehensive Citizenship Act until 1955, its adoption of a Constitution in 1950 that framed the basis of its citizenship laws was a cause of anxiety for the Pakistani constituent assembly.

The principle of *jus soli* citizenship (citizenship by birth) foundered on multiple hurdles as Pakistan contended with millions of Muslim refugees from India who had neither been born in nor been residents of any of the regions that became Pakistan. At the same time, conferring citizenship on non-Muslims who were not refugees and had been living in areas that became a part of Pakistan since before 1947 ran into the tacit understanding that only Muslims would be granted citizenship in the Muslim homeland. Through a close examination of hitherto unseen archival material on citizenship laws, Qasmi deftly brings out these contradictions in the debates leading up to the promulgation of the Citizenship Law in 1951 that continued long after in its implementation.

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Qaum, Mulk, Sultanat is threaded through with multiple individual case studies that illustrate the outsized role played by lower-level bureaucrats in the Ministry of Interior, in particular in the actual implementation of the Citizenship Law. In most cases, these individuals erred on the side of *jus sanguinis* (citizenship by descent) as the basis for citizenship by delaying and thwarting by other means the applications of non-Muslims, especially those wanting to return. Hindus could be citizens if domiciled in Pakistan, but Hindus would not be allowed to return to their homes since Pakistan was a national homeland solely for Muslims. But at the same time, the nation could not indefinitely accommodate all Muslims wanting to return either.

By 1956, as a result, Pakistani officials were urging Indian Muslims to remain in India to ensure their own security and the prosperity of Pakistan. India, for its part, was faced with the problem of not only accommodating returning Hindu refugees, but also Muslims who chose to return to India after having had some association with Pakistan. India created a permit system for resettlement or permanent return for such individuals that was mediated in many cases by officials of individual state governments, who refused Muslims on a variety of grounds.

Although Pakistan adopted the appellation of â??Islamic Republicâ??, Qasmi leads us through the multiple meanings attached to the term and the opposition to its adoption in the 1950s. While the proponents of an 'Islamic Republic' held to a modernist view of Islam, the opposition came not just from non-Muslim members of the constituent assembly for obvious reasons, but also from Muslims, who felt that it did not conform to the socio-economic equality espoused by Islam. Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehman from East Pakistan, for instance, argued that the term was a mere cover for the state to distract attention from the pressing problem of economic inequality in Pakistan. Other opposition members noted that Pakistan could bear Islamic in its name only when it had provided the basic necessities to all its people; Islamic brotherhood had to be accompanied by a redressal of socio-economic disparities.

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Qasmi argues that the term â??Islamicâ?• was adopted as aspirational, â??an empty signifierâ?• in that it could embody a variety of ambitions, from economic concerns to concerns about Indian Muslims to the desire for an Islamic state run on strictly Islamic principles. Over the course of Pakistaniâ??s history, the term 'Islamic' has been deployed by the state and other groups for a range of political purposes and socio-economic demands. 'Islamic state' has thus included multiple agendas over the course of Pakistanâ??s history: a modernist, Kemalist Islam that promoted national unity for Ayub Khan; Islamic socialism for Zulfikar Ali Bhutto; Islam based on the principles of shariat for Zia-ul-Haq; and so on.

The contestations and debates continued in the domain of the symbolic repertoire of the state, such as its icons, flag, and anthem, through which the state connected, via the nationâ??s discursive and material practices, with the people. Qasmi argues that *qaum* (or nation), which he defines as â??a metaphor that embodied a North Indian-centric, Urdu-based cultural and literary landscapeâ?• came to define Pakistanâ??s contours as a political, cultural, and legal entity (174). The state institutionalised and regulated the nation in varied ways, including in forms of dress. Muhammad Ali Jinnahâ??s very visage became state property as it decided on acceptable, official

images of Jinnah, while his attire, the north Indian sherwani, became the state-sanctioned form of ideal dress for formal occasions. Muhammad Iqbal was the other individual that the state transformed into a national icon by taking over his mausoleum and residence to display state power, and by establishing and funding research institutes to manage the study of his life and poetry.

Even Eid was appropriated and regularised as a â??national festival,â?• much to the chagrin of the ulema, to be celebrated across Pakistanâ??s regions on the same day, as the state sought to govern Islam itself. So fierce was the pushback, however, that the project to force people to observe Eid on the same day everywhere was abandoned by the state after Ayub Khanâ??s ouster as President in 1969. This is not surprising because, as the book details at length, Ayub Khan was responsible in large part for desecularising Pakistan by bringing the state squarely into the management of religion in public life. This had the unintended effect of strengthening the ulemaâ??s role in shaping the contours of religious and political discourse in Pakistan at the expense of state structures.

Writing a past

Every one of these acts was in one way or another about narrativising the national past in an attempt to define its present, but one of the most interesting sections of this book is the discussion about the Pakistani stateâ??s anxiety about how to construct a meaningful past that supported the cause of nation-making as well as state formation given Pakistanâ??s newness (in contrast to Indiaâ??s antiquity). The task was especially monumental because Pakistan had inherited so few libraries and archives from British India. This led to a feverish search for historical records to build the collections that would serve as the foundation for the writing of a national history. Set up in April 1948 for the purpose of acquiring these collections, the Historical Records and Archives Commission immediately began negotiations with the British government for the acquisition of the India Office Records, which were also claimed by India.

> Designating archival materials as 'Hindu', 'Muslim', and 'Buddhist', Pakistan claimed all of the material pertaining to Muslim and Buddhist culture from the collection, since it presented itself as a Muslim country with a Buddhist population.

Since both Pakistan and India claimed the entirety of the collection, the negotiations amongst the three dragged on for several years and failed to produce a desirable result for Pakistan. Designating archival materials as 'Hindu', 'Muslim', and 'Buddhist', Pakistan claimed all of the material pertaining to Muslim and Buddhist culture from the collection, since it presented itself as a Muslim country with a Buddhist population. As Qasmi illustrates so well, this allowed the state to create an ancient civilisational history for Pakistan that excluded Hinduism, locating its roots in Gandharan civilisation and Buddhism instead.

Until the archival materials could be acquired, however, the state set about collecting, sorting, and cataloguing the private papers of Jinnah and Fatima Jinnah as well as the papers of the Muslim League, which became the foundation for the National Archives of Pakistan. These papers were made accessible and available to scholars so that they could set about the task of writing the history of the nation under the patronage of the state. The concerns regarding a national narrative for Pakistan were evident in the debates around the creation of a National Museum for Pakistan, especially since East Pakistan had requested that a national museum also be established in Dacca. Initially reluctant to have two national museums, the central government subsidised this project â?? alongside setting up a National Museum in Karachi in 1950 â?? to ensure that the museum excluded Bengalâ??s Hindu heritage and displayed only Islamic artifacts.

The missing regions

The book is comprehensive in its coverage, but does not deal quite as much with where and how exactly the regions fit into the exercise of creating the idea of citizenship and national belonging. East Pakistan figures often, especially in opposition to the state, insisting on alternative imaginings of nationality, citizenship, and sovereignty; as the book poignantly notes, the loss of East Pakistan was â??a loss not merely of territory, but also of the radical inheritance of these debates and the possibility for envisaging other trajectories for Pakistanâ?• (169â??170). Other regions of Pakistan, whether in terms of opposition to or appropriation by the state, remain relatively less well explored. It would have been interesting to see how Kashmir, for instance, a region over which Pakistan was fighting a war at this time, became interwoven into the debates on citizenship, national belonging, and a national past. Pakistan comes across as â??abstract spaceâ?• to use Qasmiâ??s words with reference to the national anthem, which does not name any of its regions. After all, the project of state-building in Pakistan (as well as India) was tied deeply to converting a refugee, marked by lost space, into the legal category of citizen to fill the abstract space of the nation.

In sum, anyone interested in understanding the genesis of the Pakistani state should read *Qaum, Mulk, Sultanat*. It is replete with the fascinating history of Pakistanâ??s foundational moments that explain not just its struggles with identity and belonging in the early postcolonial period, but equally importantly with how a state coopts and institutionalises the nation. This in turn explains why we continue to conflate state and nation easily and casually in contemporary discourse, so carefully and methodically does the state train its citizens to believe that it is the nation embodied.

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