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From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970[*]

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Introduction

This special issue of *Modern Asian Studies* explores the shift from colonial rule to independence in India and Pakistan, with the aim of unravelling the explicit meanings and relevance of 'independence' for the new citizens of India and Pakistan during the two decades after 1947. While the study of postcolonial South Asia has blossomed in recent years, this volume addresses a number of imbalances in this

dynamic and highly popular field. Firstly, the histories of India and Pakistan after 1947 have come to be conceived separately, with many scholars assuming that the two states developed along divergent paths after independence. Thus, the dominant historical paradigm has been to examine either India or Pakistan in relative isolation from one another. While a handful of very recent books on the partition of the subcontinent have begun to study the two states simultaneously,[1] very few of these new histories reach beyond the immediate concerns of partition.[2] Of course, both countries developed out of much the same set of historical experiences. Viewing the two states in the same frame not only allows the contributors to this issue to explore common themes, it also facilitates an exploration of the powerful continuities between the pre- and post-independence periods.

Secondly, the papers that follow pose new questions about the nature of the state in early postcolonial South Asia. A small number of recent historical works concerning India and Pakistan in the immediate aftermath of independence have begun to bridge the gap between the study of 'high' and 'low' politics in South Asia by examining low-level state programmes such as refugee rehabilitation and the recovery of abducted women.[3] However, there has been very little historical work on the development of popular, public cultures surrounding the state in South Asia at this time. This special issue seeks to fill this gap by drawing on recent anthropological work on the 'everyday state'.[4] Thus, whilst remaining sensitive to the ambiguity and complexity of the boundaries between state and society, many of its papers focus on the functioning of the state in everyday life where it was actually experienced by ordinary people, with contributors exploring the interplay between the rhetorical, ideological platforms set out in New Delhi and Karachi and the interpretations of these agendas in

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[1] Tan Tai Yong and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2000); Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

[2] Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rochona Majumdar, and Andrew Sartori, (eds), *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[3] For example, Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).

[4] C. J. Fuller, and Veronique Benei, (eds), *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2000); Thomas Blom Hansen, and Finn Stepputat, (eds), *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

different localities. This framework significantly augments current understanding of postcolonial South Asia, without replicating the longstanding divide between histories of 'high' and 'low' politics in South Asia.

This volume diverges from the existing historiographical discussions about the nature of the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial. Over the past decade, scholarship on the subject has become ensnared in a debate about whether or not 1947 marked a distinct break in the history of the subcontinent. The process of transition, however, was far too complex to be encapsulated in the dichotomy change/no change. As the papers here demonstrate, partition and the integration of the princely states often had a profound effect on the everyday lives of many of the new citizens of India and Pakistan. Moreover these events not only altered the geographical extent of the states of South Asia, but also expanded the states' responsibilities and opened up opportunities for governments to pursue policies distinct from those of their colonial predecessors. At the same time, however, the papers indicate that, whilst the state in South Asia was subject to considerable adjustment in the transition to independence, the rhetorical underpinnings of the postcolonial states were often not so novel and, in many cases, the state's modus operandi did not change during this period. Thus, discourses originating in development regimes, or the nationalist movements of the first half of the twentieth century, shaped not only the policies of independent governments, but also the demands that postcolonial citizens made of them. In addition, the rationing, requisition and recruitment policies introduced during the Second World War stretched state bureaucracies to their widest extent to date, and, simultaneously, revealed new weaknesses and opened up new opportunities for corruption that stretched into the postcolonial period.

Until very recently it was also common to view the decades between 1947 and the present (2010) as a single period in the history of South Asia. Whilst lines of periodization are always perilous to draw, today's most cutting-edge scholarship suggests that it does make some sense to regard the interval between the 1930s and the 1960s as a distinct stage in South Asian history. By the third decade after independence, the major tensions extant in the nation-building projects of both India and Pakistan could no longer be contained. As these tensions erupted, they began to disrupt the ordinary functioning of politics and to tear apart existing social bonds. This is not to suggest, however, that the time before 1970 was a golden age: quite the contrary. The propensity to study the first two decades of postcolonial rule

alongside more recent decades has tended to overstate the coherence and stability of the former, especially with respect to India. India's much-discussed 'crisis of secularism'[5] in the 1990s elicited many rose-tinted evaluations of the Nehruvian state's secular credentials, but the contributions below by Gould, Newbigin, and Sherman highlight the extent to which this nostalgic view misjudges the early years of independence in India. Indeed, looking at this earlier era from a historical perspective, it becomes clear that the nature of the state and the content of citizenship were keenly contested at this time. It is in these contests, therefore, that one finds a distinct set of issues and themes that characterize this period.

Amongst these issues, the significance of the performative aspect of state power on the subcontinent is stressed in many of the papers in this volume. Recently researchers have come to highlight the ways in which both colonial and early postcolonial rule were characterized by infrequent but spectacular displays of state power. From the use of exemplary force to maintain 'law and order' in the districts, to the drafting of grand schemes designed to awe or inspire the population, certain projects or actions of the state were imbued with extraordinary meaning and designed to send a message to the population at large. Both postcolonial India and Pakistan used ceremony to underscore the legitimacy of the state and to chart a vision of the nation after independence. Khan shows that Gandhi's death rituals, including the distribution of his ashes to disparate locations in India, provided a medium through which the Congress party could try to unite a nation that had been deeply fractured by the experience of partition. In postcolonial Pakistan, as Haines and Daechsel demonstrate, large-scale development projects were often used to assert (frequently with an eye to impressing international audiences) the capacity of the state to shape not only the land and the built environment, but to discipline the people inhabiting these spaces. That these projects were essentially spectacular in nature was evident in governments' frequent disregard for the practical consequences of such schemes for the population, and the subsequent failure of some of the most prominent of them. Coombs' work also emphasizes the performative aspect of power as she traces the ways in which the disproportionate influence which British ICS officers often had over events in their districts dissipated when it became clear that the

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[5] See Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeshwary Sundar Rajan (eds), *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007).

British were leaving the subcontinent. Without the assurance that such displays of limited but spectacular power would be backed by the kind of favours that only the state could provide, the acts of British officers were unable to stem the violence of partition. This contributed to the popular sense that the state 'disintegrated' during partition. Indeed, the state has often been 'written out' of personal narratives of partition, whether from ICS men or from Punjabi refugees, as shown by both Coombs and Talbot.

  Partition's effect on the state and the extraordinary pressures that the violent displacement of people put upon state resources is the second prominent theme in this period. The state had an ambiguous place in the years straddling partition: on the one hand, the struggles of partition coupled with the promises made by nationalist leaders raised expectations to unprecedented heights. Vulnerable refugees were often extremely reliant upon the state, and rehabilitation plans often brought populations that had had no previous contact with the state into its orbit. On the other hand, as Ansari's work reveals, the early postcolonial period was no golden age for many citizens: their keen expectations that everyday life would improve dramatically after independence often met with bitter disappointment. Members of the population frequently voiced their resentment at the failures of their new government servants to live up to the expectation that citizens be given fair access to goods and services. Indeed, as Gould makes clear, access to services was often secured through kinship networks rather than through the functioning of impartial bureaucratic procedures. And the inadequacies of the state from poor planning to deficient implementation opened up opportunities for corruption to flourish. Indeed, as Ansari, Talbot and Gould note, citizens' often lofty expectations were regularly coupled with a remarkable willingness on the part of individuals to use their own guile to manipulate those services which the state did provide to secure personal advantage. Indeed, the weakness of the postcolonial state in both India and Pakistan emerges as a surprising, but recurrent theme in this period. Of course, it is common to lament the ineptitude of the early Pakistani state, especially in comparison with that of India. But these papers reveal that the Indian state, whilst undoubtedly endowed with more resources than Pakistan, was often internally incoherent and its officers seem to have been perpetually subject to undue influence. Furthermore, as Gould and Sherman underline, it was often individual state actors who did most to circumvent state structures for their own ends. This fact, which helps explain the gulf

between official rhetoric and the everyday experience of the state, suggests that historians ought to do more to problematize the very nature of the state during this period.

Finally, these papers demonstrate that conceptions of citizenship were far from settled in this period, even in India where the constitution was drafted and enacted relatively quickly. Although citizenship was defined using the language of abstract rights, the situation was invariably far more complex than this. As they emerged out of partition, the religious identities of individuals assumed extraordinary importance in the new states of South Asia, not least for the displaced, whose access to privileges often was tied to the way in which the state identified them. Whilst partition was important, the ways in which ideas of citizenship were inscribed with religious and gender norms often had their origins in the colonial period. The fundamental rights written into the Indian constitution, according to Newbigin, were demarcated within colonial legal structures which ensured that these legal conceptions of citizenship were mediated by religious and gender norms. As a result, the rights contained in the Indian constitution were often most compatible with the interests of Hindu men. Citizenship was not only shaped at the constitutional level, quotidian conceptions of belonging were equally important. Local level understandings of who was worthy of citizenship were often coloured by the intense social polarisation which accompanied the partition of the subcontinent. In partition's long wake, the loyalty of Muslims in India remained suspect long after the violence had subsided. According to Gould's research, an individual's Muslim identity could add force to allegations of corruption. Likewise, Sherman reveals the ways in which Muslims of non-Indian origin residing in Hyderabad (Deccan) were rendered suspect in the aftermath of the invasion of Hyderabad in 1948: many were deported or encouraged to leave not because their legal rights had changed, but because informal notions of belonging would have them excluded from India after 1947.

Clearly, the first two decades following independence witnessed an intense contest over the meaning and responsibilities of citizenship, and over the purpose and scope of the postcolonial state. By viewing India and Pakistan in the same frame, and examining the state in its interactions with the population at the everyday level, this special issue offers a fresh look at the field of early postcolonial history.