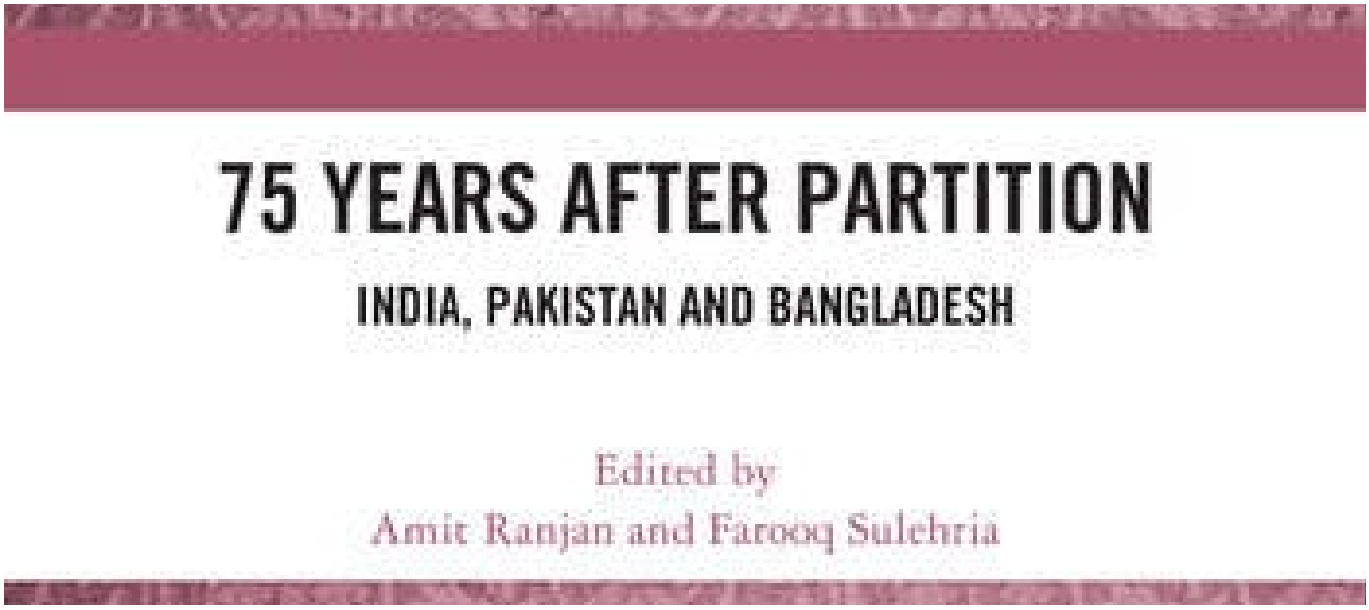

The unending India-Pakistan partition

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It is through memory, language, and stories that South Asia's history lives on, and the most significant, horrifying, yet grand event that changed the trajectory of the region is The Partition of 1947.

The newly published book *75 Years After Partition: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, edited by Amit Ranjan and Farooq Sulehria steps into the region's most enduring legacy with scholarly insight and a refusal to treat the Partition as an end or a closed chapter. Bringing together essays that were first published as a special issue of India Review, this book traces the aftershocks of the Partition, in both cultural and ideological sense, and brings to light its impact and influence on the language we speak, text we read, and movies we watch.

This Edition opens up with an introduction by the editors, Amit Ranjan and Farooq Sulehria, followed by Amit Ranjan's analysis of how Hindi and Urdu became symbols of identity in colonial India as well as postcolonial India. Then Ritika Verma and Anjali Gera Roy explore border narratives in Hindi movies, and Devika Mittal's chapter provides insight into how Muslim Identity is constructed in Indian textbooks. Qaisar Abbas then presents a critical reading of Khadija Mastoor's novel Zameen, focusing on displacement and patriarchy. Farooq Sulehria's chapter examines the way Partition is portrayed in Lollywood, while Mazhar Abbas brilliantly compares the way the Partition of 1947 is treated vs 1971 in Pakistani textbooks, particularly under Zia and Musharraf regimes. Fahmidul Haq, in his chapter, critically examines the silence of the Bangladeshi film industry on 1947 and its greater focus on 1971, while Afroja Shoma closes the edition by interrogating the blurry boundaries between history, facts, and fiction.

All these insights, with their impartial criticality, reveal how the colonial policy of "divide and rule" did not end with colonial control; instead, it has survived and has adapted in the era of resurgent nationalism. This book invites everyone, from scholars, students, and all sorts of readers, to ponder why the questions, issues, and rifts that emerged in 1947 remain unresolved even after three-quarters of a century.

Although the book also ranges across India and Bangladesh, I shall focus on the Pakistan-centred chapters as they form a coherent thematic arc while addressing debates that remain politically and culturally charged in Pakistan today, and offer the clearest insight into how the state, popular culture, and collective memory have shaped each other over the decades.

Starting with the Chapter “Building an Ideological Nation-State: Migrancy and Patriarchy in Khadija Mastoor’s Zameen”, Qaisar Abbas employs two lenses to view the post-partition transformation of Pakistan’s socio-political dynamic: Migrancy and Patriarchy. The novel in question, Zameen, is written by Khadija Mastoor, who herself was a migrant. Her work captures the ideological ambitions of a newly emerged nation and the hefty price of its founding contradictions.

Abbas’s analysis of migrancy in Zameen is compelling because it refuses to romanticise the refugee experience. The turmoil migrants have to go through is often celebrated as some sort of heroic resilience in state narratives. The novel’s post-Partition Pakistan is not the promised sanctuary for Indian Muslims but a society quick to normalise deceit, false property claims, bribery, and where bureaucratic corruption becomes part of the survival toolkit. Abbas further traces how the state’s ideological orientation, rooted in a narrow, ritualistic reading of religion, intensified patriarchal control. In Zameen, women’s place is strictly policed by cultural, legal, and economic structures. The metaphor of land in the novel is not incidental; it is gendered. As Daisy Rockwell’s translation highlights, women in this new Pakistan are valued less than the acres men so greedily count. He turns the novel into a lens to look at the almost eight centuries of institutionalized inequity by placing Zameen alongside Pakistan’s real-world gender politics (legal codifications of male privilege, cultural policing of women’s bodies)
Additionally, Abbas gestures toward the progress of women in Pakistan over the past seven decades, which includes greater workforce participation, access to education, and activism, but treats these gains almost as an afterthought, which sort of understates the novel’s lasting relevance: If Zameen speaks to the persistence of patriarchy, it also anticipates the stubborn resilience of resistance.

Moving on to Farooq Sulehria’s Chapter: Lollywood on Partition: Surprise

Departures, Anticipated Arrivals, which asks important questions: Why doesn't Lollywood depict the events and aftermath of the partition in films as much as it can or should? Why has this medium been so conspicuously underutilised in the reproduction of historical narratives in Pakistan?

The chapter's most valuable contribution lies in its insistence that Partition must be theorised not as a one-off tragedy, but as a three-stage process: Context, Event, and Memorialisation. This framing, borrowed partly from R. Samaddar's notion of "partitioned times," is more than an abstract academic exercise. Sulehria demonstrates how this model clarifies the role of what Louis Althusser called the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), which include school curricula, state rituals, and cultural production, in sustaining elite hegemony through the perpetual renewal of Partition as a living, breathing political project. Pakistani scholarship, as Sulehria notes, has lagged behind its Indian counterpart in theorising Partition as a structural, ongoing phenomenon, preferring to characterize it as "founding trauma" instead of acknowledging its constant reanimation in political, cultural, and gendered spheres. The chapter's refusal to see 1947 as a historical full-stop is one of its great strengths.

Where the chapter becomes particularly compelling is in its attention to departures from state narratives. Sulehria's readings of Kartar Singh, Jinnah, and Khamosh Pani show that, even within the constraints of censorship, certain films have disrupted the official logic of Muslim victimhood and Hindu/Sikh villainy. The insight here is not simply that counter-narratives exist, but that they survive in a cinematic tradition otherwise leaning toward the "us vs. them" narrative (Lakhon Mein Aik serving as his example of "otherification" that aligns with post-1965 jingoism).

From a gendered perspective, which Sulehria also highlights, Khamosh Pani is the standout. In Kartar Singh and LMA, women's suffering is subsumed under the register of male honour: the abduction of Umer Din's sister, for instance, is framed not as an assault on her autonomy but as an injury to masculine pride. Khamosh Pani, by contrast, relocates Partition in the body and psyche of the woman: her trauma continuous, unhealed, and inextricably linked to the later Islamisation project. Sulehria is right to note that this breaks from even left-wing nostalgia that frames Pakistan as "Partition betrayed" rather than "Partition fulfilled." Partition worked exactly as intended, and the result is what we see in Pakistan today.

His reading of Jinnah as a film that steps away from "Pakistan ideology" to appeal to a global audience is spot on, especially in its observation that the film reimagines Jinnah as a secular modernist rather than the Islamised figure portrayed during the Zia era.

Another striking absence, though one Sulehria openly acknowledges, is an analysis of why film as a medium has been so marginal to the ISA's work on Partition. His brief suggestion that the political economy of the film industry may be to blame is an opening that demands far greater consideration. Our media is extensively state-controlled, and television, literature, and even sports have been mobilised to reproduce state narratives; the comparative neglect of cinema is an anomaly.

A very remarkable factor is that the chapter situates these films in a wider theoretical and historical frame. Sulehria's engagement with scholars like Joe Cleary, Yasmin Khan, and Radha Kumar situates Pakistan's Partition within decolonial exit strategies, resisting the temptation to treat 1947 as a unique event. This comparative lens, distinguishing between partitions imposed by departing colonial empires and those emerging from the collapse of pre-capitalist empires, allows him to identify a structural logic to imperial "exits" that unites cases as

disparate as Ireland, India, and Palestine.

Sulehria’s analysis challenges readers to see Lollywood not as an apolitical entertainment industry but as a cultural apparatus that, when it chooses, can contest the very ideological foundations of the state. If there is a lesson to be drawn from Lollywood on Partition, it is that silence, too, is a discourse. The absence of Partition from most of Pakistani cinema is not an accident; it is an ideological choice.

Side note: For those who have yet to see Kartar Singh, Jinnah, LMA, or Khamosh Pani, the richness of his description leaves little room for cinematic surprise. (In other words, spoiler alert)
Lastly, In Reimagining and Reproducing the Partitions (of 1947 and 1971) in Textbooks in Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis of the Zia and Musharraf Regimes, Mazhar Abbas takes on one of the most politically charged subjects in Pakistan’s intellectual life: how the state narrates its own birth and, in the case of 1971, its own fracture, to generations of schoolchildren. Despite their rhetorical differences, Zia’s Islamisation drive via the 1979 Education Policy vs. Musharraf’s failed deradicalisation attempts in 2002 and 2006, both regimes relied on selective memory to tell two radically different stories of two partitions. As Abbas notes, 1947 fits the “emergent state” narrative; 1971, the “parent state” narrative. One fuels pride; the other demands amnesia.

Abbas shows how certain events, personalities, and regions are spotlighted while others are erased; how ethnic, religious, and political groups are otherised in service of majoritarian nationalism; how binary oppositions such as us/them, loyal/treacherous are embedded early in the minds of students. In this light, history

is not an open field of inquiry but a fenced enclosure. The critique extends to textbook compilers themselves: under-skilled, politically directed, and operating with a “tunnel vision” of history. The outcome, Abbas argues, is not historical consciousness but historical incapacitation: a citizenry trained to memorise narratives rather than interrogate them.

The result is an education system that fails both to foster critical thinking and to build an inclusive collective memory, a textbook example of the “banking model” Paulo Freire warned against.
Abbas brilliantly challenges the usual excuse for state-controlled textbooks, which is the idea that every country teaches a patriotic version of history to unite its people. He points out that this claim falls apart when we remember 1971: if nationalist history was meant to keep the country together, the break-up of Pakistan should be the loudest cautionary tale in the syllabus. Instead, it’s barely mentioned.

This chapter reminds us that until curricula embrace reflective, fact-based history over political agendas, Pakistan will keep producing citizens fluent in slogans but strangers to their past.
What emerges from all these chapters is a portrait of partition as an idea that continues to reinvent itself to serve present needs (needs of the state), whether through distortion of official histories, selective nostalgia of popular cinema, or biased, heavily censored school syllabi. Our literature, language, films, and textbooks are not passive mirrors of history; they are active agents that keep divisions alive. This book compels us to see Partition not as a wound waiting to heal, instead as a structure that is continually upheld. It exposes the dynamic between history and power, where memory is trimmed to fit the nation’s preferred silhouette. This anthology invites an unsettling reflection: If we continue to inherit the past only in its most convenient form, are we learning history, or rehearsing amnesia?

[A shorter version of the review earlier appeared in The Dawn.]

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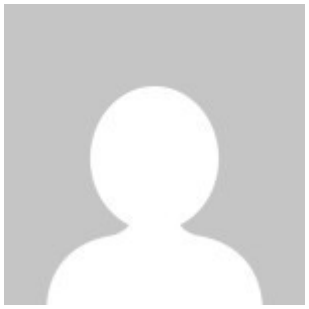

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