

A new baptism

Seventy years later we imitate Pakistan

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SEVENTY years ago, two nations were created in the Indian sub-continent. A new nation, Pakistan, was carved out; this 'moth-eaten' new nation was to be home to the Muslims of the British India. A truncated India became the successor state to the British imperial order, its pretensions, its institutions, its boundaries and its flawed control model. The grand hope was that after these cartographic rearrangements in the East and the West, the two new states and their newly endowed citizens would rediscover the joys of civilizational co-existence. That hope got definitely belied by all the bloodshed, dislocation, riots, violence, massacres that attended the Partition.

Seventy years later the two nations are

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yet to find a *modus vivendi* to live in benign comfort with each other. In 1971, India helped Pakistan's eastern wing to discover its separate national identity; consequently, Pakistan became a much more compact nation. It is much more a natural state today than it was before 1971. And, it now has a huge historic grievance against India to sustain its national narrative; it continues to define itself as a nation — internally and externally — in hostile terms towards India.

For seventy years, we in India had permitted ourselves a glorious air of grand superiority over Pakistan. As long as Jawaharlal Nehru lived, his aura, political legitimacy, global stature, mass popularity and dedicated leadership gave us in India a new sense of collective equanimity. We were imaginatively engaged in creating a new India, building its new "temples" and inculcating a scientific temper in this ancient land of medieval superstition and ignorance.

For seventy years, or most part of it, we could legitimately assure ourselves that we were better than Pakistan. We have had a Constitution and its elaborate arrangements; we were a democracy and held free and fair elections to choose our rulers; we had devised a dignified political culture of peaceful transfer of power among winners and losers after each election at the Centre and in the States; we had committed ourselves to egalitarian social objectives; we were determined not to be a theocratic State; we were proudly secular and we put in



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place procedures and laws to treat our religious and linguistic minorities respectfully; we had leaders who drew their legitimacy and authority from popular mandates; our armed forces stayed in the barracks; we had a free and robust judiciary; a mere high court judge in Allahabad could unseat a powerful prime minister. And, when a regime tried to usurp the democratic arrangement, the citizens threw the offending rulers out at the first opportunity.

For seventy years, we had every reason to believe that we were superior to Pak-

partner in the Islamabad-Rawalpindi axis; nonetheless, it is a state that remains unwavering in its animosity towards us but still runs a coherent foreign policy and maintains internal order. Its elites have perfected the art of taking the Western leaders for a ride and have seen off super-powers' intervention in neighbouring Afghanistan. There is a certain kind of stability in Pakistan's perennial instability.

Seventy years later we in India find ourselves itching to move towards a Pakistani model, notwithstanding our

On Wednesday the nation was given one more slogan. Also on that day, the ruling establishment sought to reinterpret the Quit India Movement. A few more slogans might be coined on 15th August when we celebrate 70 years of Independence. These slogans, now officially called *jumlas*, are redefining us in a mirror-image of a much-despised neighbour.

istan. Above all, we were not Pakistan. In recent decades, we became even more smug about our superiority as we have unthinkingly bought into the Western narrative that Pakistan was a "failing state" or a "failed state" — that too with nuclear weapons. What we have failed to appreciate is that Pakistani elites, too, have devised a working political culture best suited to its genius. Pakistani elites are not untroubled by inequities and inequalities in the land. We may bemoan that the Army has emerged as the senior

extensive paraphernalia of so many constitutional institutions of accountability. In recent years, we no longer wish to define ourselves as a secular nation; our dominant political establishment is exhorting us to shed our 'secular' diffidence and to begin taking pride in us being a *Hindu rashtra*. Just as in Pakistan, the dominant religion has come to intrude and influence the working of most of our institutions.

For seventy years our political class looked down upon Pakistan for its inabil-

ity to keep its Generals in their place. Seventy years on, we are ready to ape those despised "Pakis." Our Army was never so visible or as voluble as it is now; our armed forces are no longer just the authorised guardians of our national integrity, they are also being designated as the last bulwark of nationalism. Consequently, as in Pakistan, we no longer allow any critical evaluation of anything associated with the armed forces. Those who do not agree with the armed forces' performance or profile stand automatically denounced as 'anti-national.' What is more, we are thoughtlessly injecting violence and its authorised wielders as instruments of a promised renaissance.

Seventy years later, we are cheerfully debunking all those great patriots and towering leaders who once mesmerised the world in the 20th century world and who were a source of our national pride and who had forged an inclusive political community across the land by instilling in us virtues of civic togetherness. As Pakistan has done, we too now seek national glory and *garv* from re-writing our history books to cater to our religious prejudices. Just as Pakistan has institutionalized discrimination, we too are manufacturing a 'new normal' in which it is deemed normal and natural to show the minorities their place at the back of the room.

Seventy years later, the most complex legacy of the Partition — Kashmir — remains unresolved. It continues to bleed both Pakistan and India, financially, politically and spiritually. All these years we had allowed ourselves to believe that for Pakistani elites the Kashmir dispute provides a dubious platform of a meretricious coherence; not to be left behind, we in India are increasingly content to use the Kashmir problem to help us redefine the content and contours of our edgy and brittle nationalism. Worse, Kashmir continues to take a toll on our collective sensitivities. As a nation, we are getting comfortable in the use of violence and coercion to resolve differences at home and abroad.

Seventy years ago we were determined to be different from Pakistan; seventy years later we are unwittingly beginning to look like Pakistan. Mohammed Ali Jinnah must be permitting himself a crack of a smile at our unseemly hurry to move away from Jawaharlal Nehru and his founding legacy.