

1857: A QUESTION IN A PARADOX FOR THE MUSLIMS OF SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

In history of the world nations attached themselves with particular events. The event of the war of independence of 1857 is one among those for the Muslims in South Asia.

For the last many centuries in South Asia, the rival religious forces of Hindu and Islam are involved in power politics, except a brief dormant period of two e hundred years of English era.

The power matrix of this dormant period is measurable through 'Push' and 'Pull' forces amidst the creation of Pakistan.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the political gravity of 1857 through 'Push' and 'Pull' factors with following hypotheses:

Hypotheses:

"The creation of Pakistan is a bi-product of 'Pull' force of War of Independence (1857)."

Null hypotheses:

"For the Muslims of South Asia, event of 1857 is one of a mile stone towards the political struggle, amidst the creation of Pakistan."

Keywords: *Islam in South Asia, War of Independence (1857), British rule, 'Push' and 'Pull' factors, Creation of Pakistan*

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Introduction

The Indian rebellion of 1857 was a period of armed uprising against colonial authority of the British East-India Company in India between early 1857 and mid 1858. The period and events are often referred to as the first war of independence in India and as the Indian Mutiny in Britain.ⁱⁱ

This rebellion brought about the end of both The East India Company's rule in India, and the Timurid dynasty (1526-1857), replacing it with direct rule by the British government of much of the Indian subcontinent for the next 90 years, although some states retained nominal independence under their respective Rajas.

In different parts of the world Islam has identified herself with different faces. For example In Central Asia, Islam introduced herself as nationalist movements but once she crossed the Khyber Pass converted these nationalist movements into politico-religious entity.

In the marathon of all civilizations Islam is the youngest in South Asia and is understandable into two different stages.

The first stage (712 AD- 1857 AD)

Since Muhammad Bin Qasim up to Mughal Empire established by Zaheer-ud-Din Babar, is a period of introduction of Islam in the region. During the entire period Islam as a secular force acted as a source of inspiration among the local communities.

At one end as a politico-religious entity, Islam spread from northern part of India up to Bay of Bengal and on the other end up to Deccan, the south of India.

The second stage (1857- up to now)

During this stage, politico-religious entity of Islam transformed into Ideological force, as code of life for the Muslims of India and challenged the Hinduism in the name of welfare and prosperity for the people of South Asia.

Meaning of 1857

The 1857 in terms of its meaning with its different interpretations, for which the historian did not find them comfortable, is one of the most important events in the political history of South Asia.

According to some historians 1857 is known as Indian rebellion to overthrow the yolk of East India Company, and beginning of unknown journey for the Muslims

of India in South Asia, a light of hope in a dark tunnel and Muslims resurgence in the region.

For others it is only a year which is a part of a history, a day of sorrow or grief due to the downfall of Mughal Empire.

For those historians who took 1857 simply as a number, it was a number of desperation, where Muslims of India were compelled to surrender from all their claims including their claim of identity, whereas other considered it the beginning of a new Muslim identity in South Asia

1857 and the Muslims of South Asia

If one goes analyzing relationship between 1857 and the creation of Pakistan, it generates following hypothesis:

“The creation of Pakistan is a bi-product of the 1857 event”.

Nobody can deny the fact that creation of Pakistan is a bi-product of after effects of 1857 event. If this event had not taken place, Pakistan might have not been created. All historical ‘Pull’ and ‘Push’ forces of the era were responsible for the creation of Pakistan.

With reference to the struggle of Muslims in South Asia, the creation of Pakistan has raised a question mark. “Is the creation of Pakistan; is an end game in itself or a means toward an end”? The answer is not so simple.

Again a question arise in one’s mind that, if creation of Pakistan is an end game then, one may raise the question, about the establishment of first Islamic state in India by Qutb-ud-din Aybak (1206-90 AD) and much earlier to the establishment of Islamic state by Muhammad bin Qasim in Sindh (712 AD). Were those primary establishments are the beginning of the end game or they were the formative shapes of Pakistan? Answer is difficult and left up to history.

Null Hypothesis:

“For the Muslims of South Asia, event of 1857 is one of a mile stone towards the political struggle, amidst the creation of Pakistan.”

The answer to the null hypothesis is possible if the event of 1857 is taken as one of milestone towards a destiny of the political struggle for the Muslims in South Asia.

After (712 AD), with different stages and shapes of Muslim dynasties, Islam remained dominant religion in the region and kept on rolling like a traveler who could easily see his destiny sitting on the back of a mountain looking towards the grassy planes in front of him. Same did by the people of Central Asia towards South Asia.

Creation of Pakistan is one step, not as an Islamic political entity but as a main political denominator in South Asia, where the boundaries stood meaningless.

1857: A Saddle Point

From Akbar the Great (1556) to the creation of Pakistan (1947), the power politics among three religious forces of Islam, Hinduism and Christianity involved in a tug of war that changed the whole political scenario in South Asia.

During this dormant period there were two pre 1857 events known as Battle of Plassey (1757) and Battle of Buxar (1764) and two post 1857 events of independence of Pakistan and India (1947), have everlasting impacts on the politics of South Asia, the event of 1857 stands as a saddle point.

The Battle of Plassey which took place on June 23rd 1757. The opponents were

Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah, the last independent Nawab of Bengal and the British East India Company. In this battle, local forces were defeated by the East India Company forces under Sir Robert Clive.

The Battle of Buxar fought on 23 October 1764. This war was fought between the forces under the command of British East-India Company on the one side, and the combined armies of Mir Kasim, the Nawab of Bengal, Suja-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Awadh, and Shah Alam II, the Mughal Emperor. Again the local forces were defeated by the British forces.

The Battle of Plassey laid the foundation of the British rule in South Asia and Battle of Buxar established supremacy of the British in the Eastern parts of South Asia and led to the establishment of British sovereignty.

In the post 1857, with the independence of Pakistan on 14th August 1947 as a Muslim state after the period of 183 years of rule in the region, the British Raj came to an end in sub-continent.

The independence of India on 15th August 1947, the biggest Hindu state in the region of South Asia, was the second, post 1857 event.

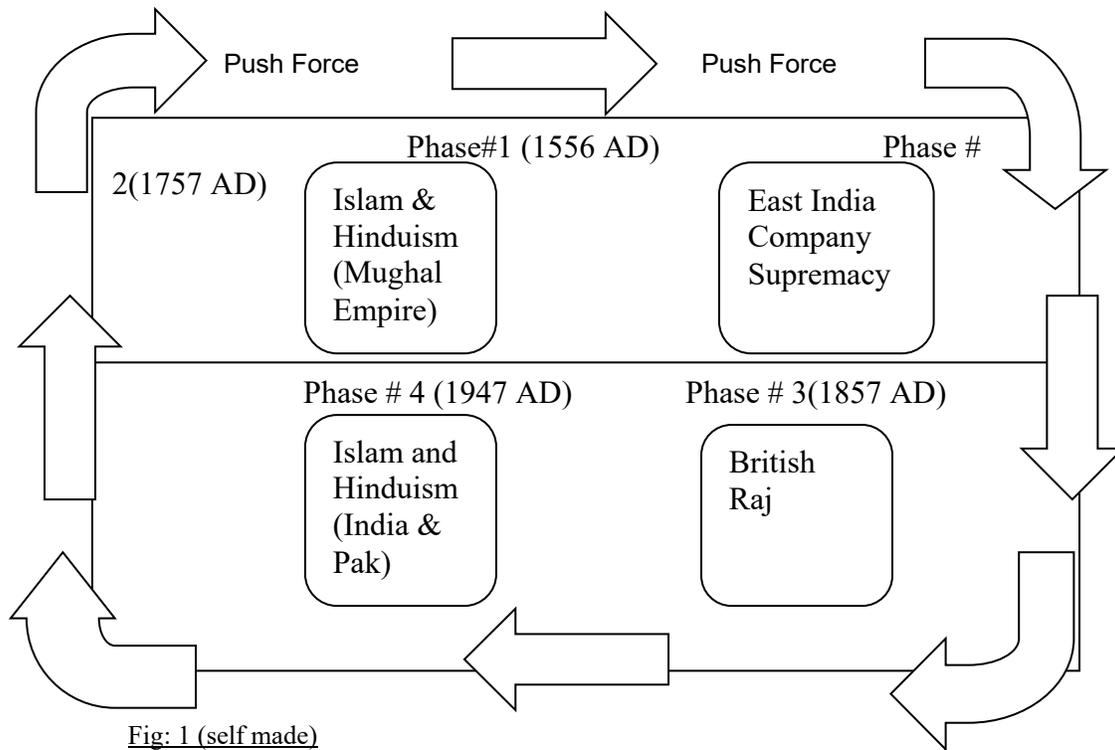


Fig: 1 (self made)

Spiral pattern of timeline (1556-1947)

PUSH FORCES	PULL FORCES
<i>Din-i-Ilahi</i> ¹ (1581) by Akbar the Mughal Empire.	Movement of <i>Hazrat</i> Mujadad-elf-Sani(1590-1605).
Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb’s Islamic resurgence movement (1618-1707).	<i>Shah</i> Wali-ullah Movement (1703-1762).
East India Company (1757-1857).	Resurgence of Hindu Movements in India (rise of <i>Shivaji</i> 1674) (Rise of <i>Samaj</i> 1828)

<u>PUSH FORCES</u>	<u>PULL FORCES</u>
British Raj (1857-1947)	Farazi movement (1830-57)
British Constitutional Reforms (1861-1935)	Ahl Hadith (1830)
	Aligarh Movement (1858-1898)

Conclusion

Since inception of Islam in South Asia, except for a short period (1757-1947), Islam remained a dominant political entity. During this short period of British rule in India, Islam restructured its strategy from political entity to political ideology, due to development in technology and diplomacy of the world which British rule brought with them in South Asia, The independence of Pakistan (1947), is a vivid example of new strategy of Islam in South Asia, named as 'Ideology of Pakistan'. During this short period of British domination, the analysis of spiral pattern of timeline with its 'Push' and 'Pull' forces (fig.1), the year of 1857 may be considered as a saddle point. What is important for the change in history in South Asia is the middle era of each century.

The present relations between India and Pakistan are forecasting the tone of a history back to square one.
