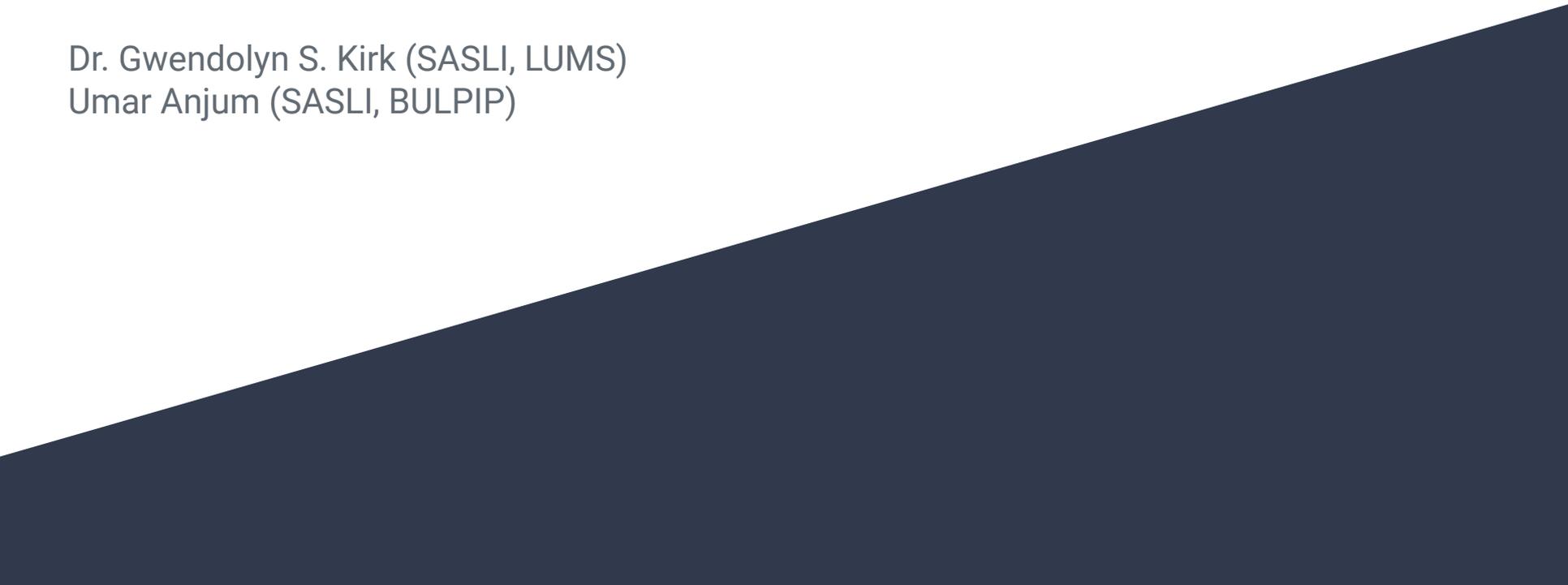


# Language, Identity, and Nation in South Asia

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# Introductions



## **Presentation Outline:**

**Part 1:** Legacy of Colonial Categories

**Part 2:** Identity and Formation of Postcolonial Nations

**Part 3:** Independence of Bangladesh

**Part 4:** Populism and Nationalism Today

***Group Discussion***

***Q and A***

# Legacies of Colonial Knowledge Production



Image: nzhistory.govt.nz

**East India Company:** 1600-1857 (first trading post established 1619, expands and claims territory through battles, treaties, and alliances with indigenous rulers)

**British Raj:** In 1857, the British government takes administrative control from the EIC, India formally becomes a colony

The British weren't able to rely only on treaties and force to rule; the **production of knowledge** about India (specifically sociology and anthropology) and its vastly diverse people, languages, religions, customs, and so on was a key tool for governance and administration.

Examples:

- Caste
- Religion
- Language

This knowledge then **reframed** autochthonous concepts and **imported** European ones regarding language, religion, caste, and the idea of nation. It impacted political, educational, economic, and other systems and structures, and these **impacts continue today** in many postcolonial states.

# Fort William College

دل کا اجرٹنا سہل سہی بسنا سہل نہیں ظالم  
بستی بسنا کھیل نہیں بستے بستے بستی ہے

दिल का उजड़ना सहल सही बसना सहल नहीं ज़ालिम  
बस्ती बसना खेल नहीं बसते बसते बसती है



Image: Scroll.in

Roughly **900 languages** are spoken in South Asia (including Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka).

Hindi and Urdu (national languages of India and Pakistan) are considered by linguists to be two varieties of one language, but thought of by speakers as different languages. Why?

One language known as Hindi, Hindvi, Zubaan-e Urdu-e Mualla, Urdu, Rekhta, Khari Boli, and Hindustani → divided into two languages (or two registers of the same language), contemporary “**Hindi**” and “**Urdu**”

**Fort William College** founded in 1800 and becomes the wellspring of the divide between Hindi and Urdu. This is more or less because it’s simple and convenient for the British according to their conceptual categories, and *not* based on actual linguistic criteria apart from script.

- Persian→Nastaliq Script→Urdu→”Muslim” language
- Sanskrit→Devanagari Script→Hindi→”Hindu” language

This linguistic division is also part of a system of cultural and religious divisions that have **reshaped the map** of South Asia.

# Hindi-Urdu Divide Begins to Deepen



**1857: First War of Indian Independence;** as a result the British government annexed India and it formally became a crown possession (rather than administered by the EIC)

After this war, as a result of different groups falling out of favor or trying to gain favor with the colonial government, Hindus and Muslims emerge as separate and antagonistic political factions.

In North India, one result of this divide was the beginning of conscious efforts to separate Hindi from Urdu along the lines that the British had set up. Urdu reformers in the 19th century worked to purge Sanskrit-derived vocabulary from Urdu, and Hindi reformers worked to purge Persian and Arabic vocabulary from Hindi.

This linguistic differentiation continues today!

# English Education Act 1835



## Macaulay's minute on education:

8. --- dialects spoken among the natives of this part of India --- are **poor** and **rude** ---

10. I have **no knowledge** of either Sanskrit or Arabic. --- a **single shelf** of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The **intrinsic superiority** of the Western literature ---

13. --- there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own ---

## English was made;

official language for the government, language of courts, medium of instruction

Parho Farsi Becho Tail **پڑھو فارسی بیچو تیل**

- Ranjit Singh's Progressive Education System
- Punjabi 'qaida' Persian, Punjabi, Logic, Maths
- Schools for girls & attached with religious places
- Craft schools, miniature painting, sketching etc
- Burning of Punjabi qaida by British

# Divide & Rule



**Indian National Congress 1885:** All India secular nationalist party, followed Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent principles. By 1905 moderate vs extreme division started. **Muhammad Ali Jinnah** was member of moderate group who later left the party.

**Partition of Bengal 1905:** Population of 78 million. People had to travel to the provincial capital Calcutta upto 1800 km. East Bengal had poor economic conditions and had muslim majority. Outrage and violence erupted and it was cancelled.

**Muslims League 1906:** Protect the **rights** of Muslims. Bengal.

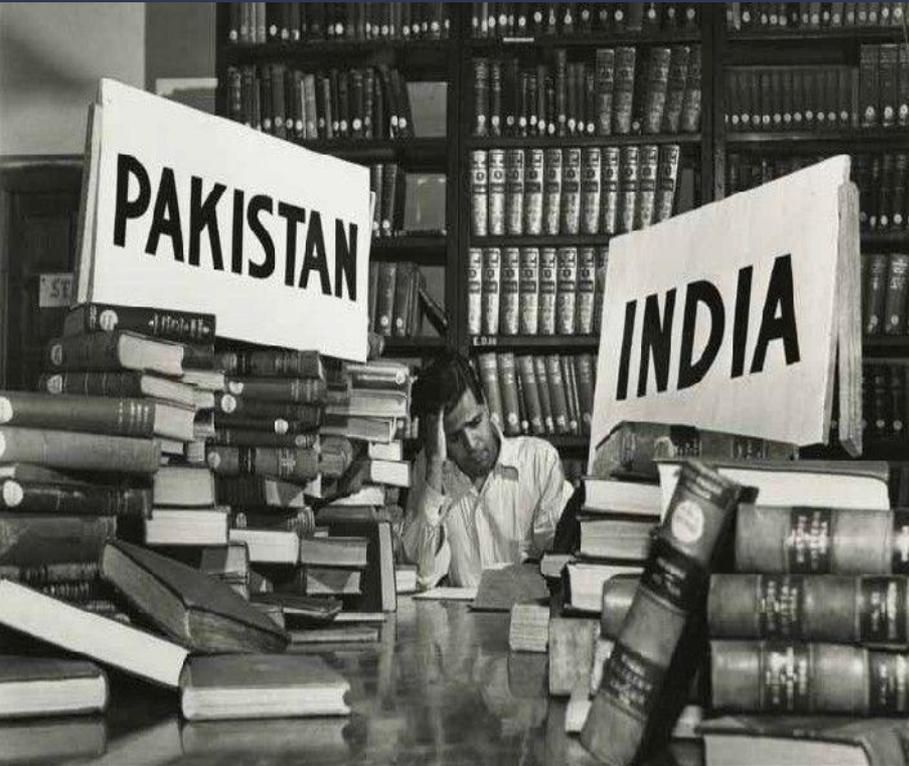
## Atrocities:

**Jallianwala Bagh massacre:** peaceful unarmed protest, troops blocked the main entrance, took up position on a raised bank, killed 379 and injured more than 1200. In his report he writes "I have heard that between 200 and 300 of the crowd were killed. My party fired 1,650 rounds".

**Bengal famine 1943:** 2-3 million people died because of starvation and diseases caused by shortage of rice. Social fabric of society was broken while British denied the famine and had ample food stored in godowns in and outside India.

**Resistance:** Silk Handkerchief, Babbar Akali, Ghadar Party (all religious groups equally contributed)

# Pakistan Resolution



**Separate Ways:** In 1930s that the divide between Indian National Congress and Muslim League started to grow.

**Separate Homeland:** In 1940 Pakistan resolution was passed in Lahore however majority of Muslim religious leadership was against this idea and stood with Congress.

**Mountbatten's and Radcliffe arrival:** March 1947 and July 1947. Radcliffe had never been to India before and never returned, he took his decisions through maps in just five weeks, the decision were taken in a haste, the borders which he declared offended Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims alike, led to violence and had consequences in coming times.

**Violence & riots:** 500,000 to 1 million died, more than 10 million became refugees. Rape and kidnapping of women.

**Death of big leaders:** Gandhi killed by a Hindu extremist in Jan 1948, Jinnah died of illness in Sep 1948

**Urdu & Punjabi:** English is declared as the official language while Urdu becomes National Language of Pakistan to create 'Unity' and Punjabi becomes marginalized. Bengali the language with most speakers is ignored.

# Language and identity in newly-created Pakistan



By the time of Independence, Urdu had come to be seen as the language of South Asian Muslims, even though **the majority of Muslims were (and are) not Urdu speakers**, or did not speak it as their home language.

Note the **separation** of Urdu from its geographic homeland on the strength of this ideology, and the **exclusion** of languages native to the geographic regions that made up Pakistan.

**1948:** Muhammad Ali Jinnah proclaims in Dhaka: “Let me make it very clear to you that **the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language**. Anyone who tries to mislead you is really **the enemy of Pakistan**.” This is disappointing to Bengalis who wanted Bangla to have equal status with Urdu.

**1952:** Language Movement, violent suppression at Dhaka University, multiple students killed by police

**1956:** Bangla officially becomes a national language, but tensions remain between the wings of the country

# 1971: Bangladesh Liberation War



1970: Military junta refuses to accept election results that would put the Bengali political party the Awami League in power.

March 1971: On March 25, Bangladesh declares independence, and with Operation Searchlight sets off 9-month civil war that included genocidal violence, attacks on intellectuals and minorities, and the organized mass rapes of hundreds of thousands of women and girls. Estimates vary but it is thought that nearly half a million Bengalis are killed.

December 1971: Pakistan surrenders and Bangladesh becomes an independent nation.

This conflict showed that once again there were serious flaws in prioritizing religious over ethnic and linguistic solidarities in the formation of nation-states.

# Language and Identity in Bangladesh after 1971



Image: pakistantoday.com.pk

However, ethnic, linguistic, and religious struggles still pervade in Bangladesh, as in other South Asian countries.

- Stranded Pakistanis: Around half a million Urdu-speaking ethnic Biharis who remained stateless in Bangladesh for 40 years
- Violence and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities, Hindus
- Linguistic discrimination in India against Bangladeshi Hindus who resettled in West Bengal
- Currently, Bangladesh is home to more than a million Rohingya refugees fleeing genocide in Myanmar

What does this suggest about the stability of the category of “nation”? Can any nation be homogenous?

# Politics of Populism



Rise of right-wing governments, populism which is mirrored across world resulted in slogans like **'Shining India'** in 2004 and then **'Abki Bar Modi Sarkar'** meaning this time Modi will rule, in 2014 Modi allegedly modified a little and used it to show his support in a Houston rally saying **'Abki Bar Trump Sarkar'** to endorse Trump.

**'Maa, Mati, Manush'** meaning Mother, Motherland, and People gave landslide victory to All India Trinamool Congress ending the 34 year rule of communist party in West Bengal.

In Pakistan Muslims League used this slogan in 90s **'Jaag Punjabi Jaag'** meaning wake up Punjabi wake up. This gave the party a two-thirds majority.

**'Labaik Movement'**. Labaik is Arabic for Here I am or I am present. Traditionally used when circling the Holy Kaaba in Mecca, was adopted by a right wing religious party in Pakistan and not only they became gained immense public support but also won seats in general elections.

# Blasphemy & Beyond



**Rise of Hindutva:** is the idea of rise of Hindu nationalism

**Babri Masjid:** It was claimed by Hindu nationalists that it was the birthplace of deity Rama. The mosque was illegally demolished by a mob in 1992, recently the Indian Supreme Court allowed building of Ram Temple and Modi laid the foundation stone.

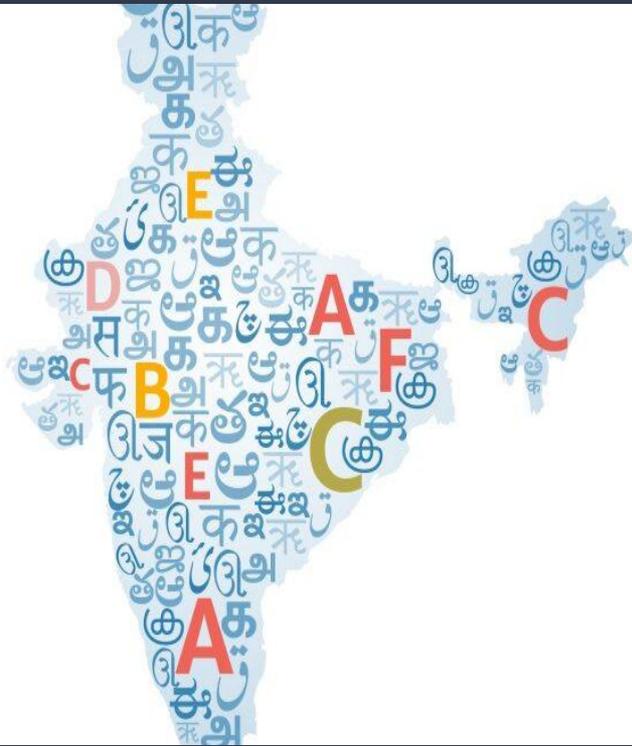
**Ghar waapsi:** (returning back home) is reconversion of Muslims, Sikhs and Christians back to Hinduism.

**Gujarat Riots:** three day communal violence, around 2000 killed, double the amount injured, state government was accused of not doing enough. Modi was chief minister.

**Anti-Dalit violence:** Caste-related violence has a long history in India. Dalits are victims of all sorts of crime by high cast.

**Joseph Colony:** In Pakistan of anti-Christian sentiment is on rise. Usually it is blasphemy related but many a time it turns out to be a hate issue. Asia bibi case. Forced conversions of girls and minors in Sindh.

# Language, Identity, & State



## Formation of India:

500 + Princely States covered 40% of the area of pre-independence India and constituted 23% of its population. Many states were based on language but this was controversial and so states have changed over the years to reflect different movements.

**Presidencies:** Madras, Bengal, Bombay, United Provinces

## Active Movements in India & Pakistan:

Asam, Kashmir, Manipur, Nangaland, Punjab, Tripura, Balochistan, Sindh

## Language Movements in India and Pakistan:

Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Braj, Saraiki, Sindhi, Pashtunistan

**Renaming of cities & replacing languages:** Sanskrit will replace Urdu as an official language in Uttarakhand, as anti-Urdu sentiment rises. Allahabad has been renamed “Prayagraj” in an effort to make it sound less Muslim. This follows renaming of cities and streets from their colonial names which occurred across South Asia.

**Language & class; case of Pakistan:** Haleem vs Daleem and Khuda Hafiz vs Allah Hafiz, English vs Urdu vs Punjabi

# Discussion Questions, Q&A

See the PDF “Language Identity Nation Discussion Qs”

Please also see the PDF “Language Identity Nation Resources” for some of our sources and more suggested resources.

We would love to hear from you; if you have further questions or comments, please do be in touch!

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**Thank you!**