

The Colonial Origins of Territorial Disputes in South Asia

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Abstract

South Asian territorial disputes are intractable at present and this article argues that the most important reason for their intractability is their colonial origins. With the advent of Britain in the region, new notions of territory and boundary were imposed on pre-modern South Asian states. Moreover, to seek total control and more revenue, partitions in the region were done without much consideration for socio-cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious complexities. This article argues that after decolonization of the region, territorial disputes have become more pronounced, as there is no overarching authority like Britain to suppress them. This paper concludes that without recognizing the salience of colonial origins, it would not be possible to resolve these territorial disputes in South Asia.

Keywords

territorial disputes, South Asian conflicts, colonialism and territorial disputes, border disputes, colonial borders in South Asia

Territorial disputes in South Asia are as intractable and real as they are in other parts of the world. They are both the cause as well as the result of regional political contests and rivalries. To avoid future conflict or war in the region, a mechanism to peacefully sort out these territorial disputes must be devised (Vasquez 1993, 307). To that end, the origins and nature of these disputes must be studied and understood. Their basic nature, manifestations and trajectories are influenced by the political discourses in the countries of the region. However, these territorial disputes are also 'constructions' both at the ideational level as well as at their physical manifestation level, which has been existed for the last two and a half centuries. There is no intention to say that there were no territorial disputes in South Asia before the advent of British rule. Of course, there have been contestations on the issue of territory from time immemorial. However, the notion of territory and its various modern constituents in its modern use was not there (Kaplan 2010, 9). The transformation in South Asia during the colonial period had important bearing on the origins as well as the course of most of these territorial disputes in South Asia. In this paper, South Asia includes the countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Basically the concept of South Asia is largely inherited from the administrative boundaries of the British Raj (Behera 2008, 129). However, this paper largely deals with three or four territorial disputes between Pakistan-Afghanistan, India-China, India-Pakistan, and India-Bangladesh.

Colonialism, in most of its colonies, had important implications in the homogenization of categories, which were rather heterogeneous in the past. The imposition of neat categorization, which largely evolved in a very different socio-cultural context, on South Asia was quite useful for Britain, but they created a lot of anomalies in the future interstate relations of South Asia. Colonial modernity and its interactions with indigenous traditions became not only a progressive movement but also created a situation in which colonies were forced to adopt something which was never discussed or contemplated before (Scott 2004). When Britain established direct political control in the mid-19th century, the Indian sub-continent was still operating in a pre-modern era and from cultural values to social norms and economic organization to identity discourse, this region was very different from the West.

Thus, advent of a new mode of thinking and colonial expediency drew and demarcated several boundaries in South Asia, both intra-state and inter-state, which were insensitive to the complex realities of the region (Michael 2014, 2). The borders, which were drawn during the colonial period in South Asia, were thus problematic from the very beginning. These new borders and territorial demarcations led to conflicts between the states of the South Asian region and these

disputes have remained arguably the most important fault lines on which countries of the regions have had several full-scale and limited wars such as the India-Pakistan War and the Indo-China War. The territorial disputes of South Asia, even today, make the situation ripe for an armed conflict and hence, a nuanced understanding of their colonial origins might be useful in providing recourse to at least some efficient management of the issue, if not their complete resolution.

IDEATIONAL CHANGES IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Notions of Territory and Sovereignty

The Indian subcontinent is separated geopolitically from the rest of the world by some natural boundary demarcations such as rivers, oceans and mountains. These natural demarcations loosely define the region of South Asia and the states within it. The territories of different political units in South Asia were contiguous, porous and ever-changing (Phadnis 2001, 354) and the notion that territory is an instrument of 'affect, influence and control' were manifested in a very different manner. Before the arrival of Britain in the political arena of India, the Mughal Empire and a few other kingdoms did exist. However, their territories were less defined and the political equations among them were not organized as per the western notion of sovereignty. Generally, units and kingdoms inside an empire have different degrees of control and the central government enjoyed varied degrees of sovereign control over them. For example the units, which were far removed from the capital city, had generally more autonomy and space than the areas, which were adjacent to the center. Interestingly, contact between two adjoining areas of two different kingdoms was quite frequent and territorialization of kingdoms or empire was not that neat.

With the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the East India Company got involved in the political expedition of India. In the first hundred years, the company as a representative of Britain in India tried to change this prevailing loose notion of territoriality in India. For a westerner, the confusing and complex demarcation of territory was both intellectually backward and administratively challenging. The new notion of neat and well-demarcated territory in South Asia was thus considered to be a pre-condition of modernity (Gellner 1983, 1). In a way, it was also a medium to exert exclusive control on a particular area. Since the goal of control and exclusivity are very central to any colonial project, the new notion of territoriality was very important to be exerted and exercised. After the transfer of control of India from the East India Company to the British government, strict territoriality was further strengthened. The British administration even within India not only

divided the political units into one centrally governed one, but also allowed more than five hundred princely states to continue with their existence. In a gradual manner though, most of these princely states were stripped of their distinctiveness.

The effect of this new territoriality led to the creation of various states and intra-state political units which were devoid of cultural and identity connections. Sometimes people from the same socio-cultural and identity adherence were divided into two or more political units and in some other cases, less related socio-cultural groups were put into one political unit (Tohring 2010, 30). Demarcation of the territory clearly led to the emergence of a Pan-India identity because of imposed homogenization; but in a way, it also created territorial disputes, which continue to haunt the South Asia region even today.

The notion of sovereignty was another new element in the political discourse, which was introduced in South Asia by Britain (Michael 2014, 123). In a territory belonging to a particular kingdom, people have several cultural, religious and other connections as well as commonalities with people from another kingdom who reside adjacent to them. Political control over a territory and people was not absolute and thus, the western notion of sovereignty was almost absent in regional politics. The legitimacy of the political rule of a king or emperor was generally derived from traditional or charismatic authority and South Asia was still not aware of the legal-rational authority (Paranjape 2013, 7). Without attributing any value-judgment to the pre-modern or modern ways to demarcate two political units, it would suffice to say that South Asia or for that matter other parts of Asia too, were not aware of the notion of precisely determined borders and the absolute sovereignty of a kingdom over a piece of land. The example of the suzerain relationship of China with its East Asian neighbors is often misunderstood because inter-state relations at that time were not governed by the western notion of sovereignty. It would be incorrect to apply the western notion of sovereignty to East Asia and say that Korea was not an independent country during the *Joseon* dynasty since it paid tribute to China. The China-Korea relationship was a relationship of mutuality and interdependence in which the existing hierarchy was not considered antithetical to the existence of a sovereign country. The change in the principles of inter-state relations by bringing the notion of sovereignty has been a modern phenomenon, which happened in the Northeast Asia around the end of 19th century or early 20th century (Kang 2009, 82). The colonial period in the history of South Asia was also a period when a similar change happened and hence the cross-border connections between the two political units were articulated from the perspective of sovereignty.

From Frontier to Border in South Asia

The arrival of Britain in South Asia is also associated with another important shift in the region from frontier to border demarcation. Before the ascendancy of Britain in the area, the whole region throughout history was 'very much a fluid cultural organism' (Wink 1996). The phenomenon was not limited to South Asia alone and in a way it was changed from a pre-modern organization of political units to a modern articulation. In the first case, generally, political control of one kingdom used to gradually diminish while moving away from the center and there were grey areas of control, which divided one kingdom from another. The demarcation of political units was thus essentially loose and porous.

In fact, foreign intervention, the quest for sharp borders and the search for a 'nation-state' all began at the same time in South Asia. Colonial cartography ventured into a project to draw boundaries in the region to bring in a western legal notion of political units. It was an introduction of a new epistemology for a state and created a modern regime with a definite space and spatial extension. The conceptual and discursive apparatus of international law, modern geography, geopolitics and borders are interwoven in the enabling frame that made the drawing of the conflict-ridden dividing line possible in the region (Mahmud 2010, 7). Actually the drawing and maintaining of these sharp lines was part of the very core of the colonial civilizing project. Through these lines, several layers of sovereignty such as colonies, suzerains, protected states and protectorates could be exercised and justified. It may be called that this was an era of 'boundary making' in the region (Holdich 1899, 466).

It was essential for the imperial powers to rearrange geography both in the philosophical sense and also in practice to chart out their course of actions and create structures of domination. And, geography was the vanguard of this (colonial) enterprise to reach, discover, and make colonized territories (Livingstone 1992, 168). The imperatives of colonialism gave one of the most important roles to geography and geographers, as they helped in territorial acquisitions, economic exploitations, militarism and even race domination (Hudson 1977, 12).

In the case of South Asia too, British cartographers produced the Bengal Atlas in 1779 and the Map of *Hindoostan* (India) in 1782, which had both strategic and administrative imperatives. However, it does not mean that before that the South Asian territory was not mapped or surveyed; but there was a new attempt to create and produce a colonizer's version of 'their India' (Baber 1996, 143-146). In a way, it was also an attempt to create an India which had hardly ever been a single, integrated political entity (Mishra 1990, v). Thus, it is very clear that Britain made an important intervention in the geographical space of the region by creating space and bodies through these lines on a map, which had no substantial consid-

eration for any cultural or economic patterns on the ground. Hence they led to territorial disputes, which has continued to remain intractable and in most cases, has become even exacerbated in the postcolonial period.

The movement from frontiers to borders in South Asia could have been done by the natives as well, had they been allowed to understand, internalize and produce their own borders. In fact, border making would then have been less problematic. In all probability, it would have been accomplished in an incremental manner by becoming informed and corrected by the ground realities and it would have surely been more stable. However, imposition by the imperial power in a sudden manner, with scant regard for local complexities, and by the coercive enforcement, the whole process got distorted. These borders, thus, rather than becoming a source of order and clarity, became a cause of territorial disputes.

Searching for and Making of Nation-states in South Asia

With British colonization, there also arrived in South Asia, another modern notion called, nationalism. Earlier too, there might have been some commonalities of cultural, linguistic and other ideological space, encompassing the vast landmass of the Indian subcontinent; but there was no nation-state in the region before the coming of Britain. The idea of modernity and nationalism which came to India with Britain made the leaders of South Asia do a rethink about their identity and political course by bringing in their own discourses of nationalism. There were at least two broad tendencies in the articulation of nationalism in India during the colonial period. Firstly, there were attempts to articulate a pan-Indian nationalism encompassing all the areas, which was governed by British colonial rule. This type of nationalism had two primary sources of articulation—historical and cultural linkages across the Indian subcontinent from the ancient period, and an anti-colonial common objective across India to come together to fight against a European colonizer (Chatterjee 2012, 216). Secondly, there were also attempts to invent multiple nationalities by strictly following the European model of nationalism, which was based on ethnicity, religion, language, identity and cultural homogeneity. What the first kind of articulation of nationalism propagated and is continuing to do is an ‘idea of India’ which goes beyond all the diversity of the Indian subcontinent (Khilnani 1998, 197). However, the latter variety of nationalism questions this proposition. Amidst the contest between the two types of ideas of nationalism, Britain favored the second one which would bring a divide in the anti-colonial struggle and thus help in its colonial political goals in the region. The division of the anti-colonial movement in South Asia during the colonial period by subsequently creating various states, such as Afghanistan-India, Pakistan-India, and India-Bangladesh was a culmination of the colonial agenda to divide and rule

the Indian subcontinent (Chandra 2008, 277). There may be justifications from the British perspective that these multiple articulations of nationalism in the Indian subcontinent were closer to the European classic course of nationalism, but they were devoid of complex realities of the regional socio-cultural landscape. At present, most of the territorial disputes in South Asia are in essence contests, which originated from the uninformed demarcation along these nationalities.

Notwithstanding these two neat models of articulation of nationalism in the South Asian theatre, the colonial rule could also be attributed to the distortions in their articulation and mutual contests. Whereas the Muslim League in India was demanding a separate country for the Muslims on religious lines and Britain was not averse to this idea, the spread of Muslims in India was not limited to any particular territory (Noman 2009, 4). A Muslim population was found in almost every province in India, and they had a majority in only three states- Jammu and Kashmir, Hyderabad and Lakshadweep. Interestingly, Jammu and Kashmir was ruled by a Hindu king for centuries and the region had a unique Kashmiri variety of Islam. Hyderabad occupied a tiny territory out of the huge landmass of the Indian subcontinent and Lakshadweep is an island in the Arabian Sea separated from mainland India. The Muslim League's articulation of a separate country for Muslims in accordance with its 'flawed' two-nation theory (Bahadur 1998, 53-54) was allowed to prevail by Britain and it has remained a primary contest in South Asia and to this day finds reverberation in the contemporary territorial disputes of the region. For example, the contest over the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, and border disputes between India and Pakistan could largely be taken as a conflict between these two varieties of nationalism. Pakistan claims that since Muslims are the majority in Jammu and Kashmir, it must be a part of Pakistan but India never accepted the logic that the nation-state could be created on the basis of religion and thus the claim by India over Jammu and Kashmir is no less realistic. Actually, the absurdity of the religious basis for creating nation-states was exemplified in the creation of East Pakistan, which has no territorial connection with West Pakistan and the distance between the two parts was more than 2,000 kilometers. Unsurprisingly, East Pakistan got separated from West Pakistan and emerged as a new state, Bangladesh; in 1971 leading India to claim that it was a powerful refutation of the two-nation theory.

There was another discourse of Hindu nationalism in India, similar to the one by the Muslim League about Muslim nationalism, and this aspired for a separate 'Hindu state' in South Asia. In a mythical sense, the backers of Hindu nationalism argued for a *Brihattar Bharat* (Greater India), which was spread from Afghanistan in the west, to the Bay of Bengal in the east (Herb & Kaplan 2008, 1208). They selectively evoked ancient and medieval kingdoms of India, which were spread

across this geographical stretch and claimed that India as an heir of that political entity must claim all these territories; otherwise, it would remain an unfinished project for ever. The claims and counter-claims of the discourse have been the cause of various disputes, making any resolution virtually impossible.

Thus, the varieties of nationalism and its discourses in South Asia raising from the time of colonization have been integrally linked with territorial disputes. These discourses and for that matter, any discourse on modern nationalism creates a division between 'self' and 'other.' Unfortunately, divisions of the socio-cultural, religious, linguistic, and ethnic identities which are demanded at the idea level are much more mixed-up and complex to be assigned a particular geographical space or territory; and thus the contest for territory is almost inevitable. The course, correlations and coexistence of various nationalities in the South Asian territory during the pre-colonial period was questioned; however, no satisfactory alternate solution or even sympathy for an alternate political arrangement on the ground could be arrived at.

COLONIAL POLICY AND PRACTICE: STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS TO ADMINISTRATIVE CONVENIENCES

Britain not only succeeded in the ideological imposition of modern categories on a pre-modern society like India in a careless manner, also divided or integrated various territories in accordance with her colonial objectives. For example, in 1907, Britain decided to divide an Indian province of Bengal into East and West Bengal on administrative grounds (Fraser 2008; Chatterji 1994). Actually, dividing Bengal had less to do with administrative rationales. It was rather a ploy to divide a powerful centre of the freedom struggle on religious lines. The division later on became the blueprint for the Radcliffe commission, which in 1947 constructed borders of the East Pakistan along these lines. British cartographers had comprehensive land surveys and demarcation projects for India, which was an essential part of their colonization project (Ramachandraiah 1995). Basically, surveying was done to bring more people and areas into the colonial control, as it would generate more revenue. The use of cartography for Lord Curzon was meant for both 'administration and exploitation' purposes (Dixit 1988, 127). Almost all the boundaries, which were created inside India or between India and other countries, had singularly colonial designs in the mind and very little attention was paid to ethnic, linguistic and other socio-cultural factors. The boundaries which were determined during the period and which have become part of the disputes at present are related to Pakistan-Afghanistan, India-Pakistan, India-Bangladesh,

India-China, and India-Myanmar. These boundaries were problematic even when they originated, and continue to remain so even after seventy years of the withdrawal of Britain from the region. It would not be possible to deal with all the boundary problems of South Asia in this paper; and hence, the attempt would be to focus on the three most difficult territorial disputes in the South Asian region, with an aim to understand their colonial origins.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Territorial Disputes and Durand Line

The first modern boundary dispute in contemporary South Asia has been the boundary question between Pakistan and Afghanistan, divided by the Durand Line in 1893. It is interesting to note that through the Berlin Conference of 1885, Britain wanted to create an alliance of Egypt, Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan against czarist Russia. In such a regional political context, Britain tried to reframe its colonial space (Merry 2003). The famous scholar of Geopolitics, Halford J. Mackinder also propounded that in whole of the British Empire this was the frontier which was more prone to any conflict (Mackinder 1968) and Britain was right to recognize this task at an appropriate time. It was basically part of the Great Game in which Britain wanted to expand itself westward (or at least to stop Russian movement eastward) and Czarist Russia wanted to move towards the east (Paul, Wirtz & Fortmann 2004, 309). Thus, Britain decided that to make Afghanistan a buffer and create a border, which was earlier for all practical reasons a frontier having the quality of being porous and mobile. Another important incentive for Britain was that the historic trade routes connecting China, India, Central Asia, Persia and the Arab world passed through this territory. After considering their colonial imperatives, Britain decided to have three fold frontiers- protectorates, neutral zones and a buffer in-between. Actually the western frontier of India was supposedly extended till the Indus River and the territory between the Indus and the Oxus Rivers was a region which was dominated by the Pashtun population. The region was politically volatile till 1747 and it was Ahmad Khan Durrani, a Pashtun military leader who integrated the area into one functional political unit (Barfield 2010). In the 1830s, when there arose certain internal conflicts in Afghanistan for the throne, Britain got involved and tried to become a kingmaker. From then on, Britain continued to take interest in the domestic politics of Afghanistan. In the process of expanding her colonial control westward, in the mid-19th century, Britain won control over Punjab the neighboring territory of Afghanistan. Britain then decided that she should now have a 'close border' policy, which implies that it was not required to move further west. The Pashtun people were willing to have their autonomy and because of the problematic nature of this area, Britain had more than twenty military operations in the area between 1857 and 1881.

In 1876 the Disraeli government changed the British policy of 'close border' to 'forward policy,' which was meant to expand British control beyond the Indus River (Tripodi 2011, 16). Through the Second Afghan war in 1878, Britain made Afghanistan a vassal state of Britain, though they withdrew their soldiers in 1880. However, the king of Afghanistan was in trouble because of constant interventions of Russia and Britain in its domestic affairs and therefore went to London to talk directly with the British government. He was not given a fair hearing and finally he accepted to demarcate Afghanistan's eastern boundary with Britain and thus the Durand line was created in 1893 by the Amir and Henry Mortimer Durand, the Foreign Secretary of British India.

Without any ethnic or historical basis, it was easier to decide a line on paper than on the actual ground. It basically sliced 'through tribes, villages, and clans' and 'cut the Pukhtoon people into two' (Jones 2009, 23). The result was that the Pashtun population was divided into modern day Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the Third Afghan War in 1919, another attempt was made by the Pashtun people to search for their political affiliation. Even in the later years of the British colonialism in South Asia, these people tried to take every advantage to assert their political will and they even supported the Indian freedom struggle, which was going on against British colonial rule. Even in the Cold War days and beyond, the artificial demarcation and absurdity of the Durand line made the region unstable and along with several other factors, the territorial disputes have remained alive and the region unstable.

India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh Territorial Disputes and Radcliffe Lines

The Radcliffe Lines divide India-Pakistan in the west and India-Bangladesh in the east. The two borders of India have been a source of trouble from their very creation at the junction of Indian independence from Britain in 1947. In a very interesting twist of events, the boundary was decided exclusively by one man, who was a Law Professor at the University of Oxford having insignificant experience in governance, international relations, geopolitics and most importantly the region of South Asia (Chester 2009). Sir Cyril Radcliffe was called up by the British government in India to divide Hindu and Muslim populations of India into two countries and he had to decide about the boundary in five weeks. Basically, the very idea of creating states on the basis of religion was quite problematic. Actually, there were Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs and several other religious denominations in India and it was neither a progressive nor a practical idea to create states on the basis of religion. Moreover, the distribution of these religious groups in the large territory of the Indian subcontinent was so complex that identifying a definite ter-

territory for any of them was not an easy task. If Britain was in agreement to provide Muslims a separate state, then by the same logic it might be argued that Sikhs and other religious communities were also equally justified to have their own separate states. Actually, the demand for a separate Muslim state was based on the 'two nation' theory, which propounded that Hindus and Muslims can not coexist in one country (Chakravarty 2003). However, a point to be noted here is that the largest political formation which represented more than 70-80 percent of the Indian national movement and which had leaders from all religious communities never agreed to this proposition. Actually, the Indian National Congress and its leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi even threatened that "the partition of India would be possible only over my dead body" (Gandhi 2003, 247). However, Britain decided to support or at least to agree with the demands of the Muslim League, which was the main political force behind a separate state for Muslims. The British supported this demand because this strategy was useful in weakening the force of the Indian freedom struggle by dividing it on religious lines. The Radcliffe Lines demarcated a stretch in both the western and eastern sides of India as the territory of Pakistan. It is interesting to note here that Muslims from these areas were not great supporters of the Muslim League. Actually, the Muslim League had their strong hold in the central part of India and even after the division of India-Pakistan, most of the supporters of the Muslim League remained in India (McLeod 2008, 73).

Thus the creation of a separate state for Muslims, in a way, helped to further promote the colonial strategy of Britain. When it became clear that the British were going to leave India soon, Lord Mountbatten, the then Viceroy of India invited Radcliffe who was his colleague at Oxford to draw a line of division (Louis 2006, 9, 411-412). It is noteworthy to state here that Radcliffe had never visited India till then. Radcliffe arrived in India on 8 July 1947. He had neither the qualification nor any interest nor even sufficient time (he had just about a month) to perform this daunting task. In such a short time, it was not possible to have any field research or survey done. Thus most of the decisions taken about partition were done on the physical map. The demarcations were done so quickly, and were so far-fetched from reality, that some villages were split into two and there were even cases where, since the line passed directly through some individual houses, it resulted in a situation where a part of the house was in India and the other part in Pakistan. Around 90 million people were directly affected by this division and this catastrophic boundary demarcation forced around 10-12 million people to leave their homes and move to either India or Pakistan (Khan 2007). Border issues and ethnic clashes erupted immediately after the division and according to one estimate, in the very first few months after the division, around one million people lost their lives, and there was terrible human suffering (Wadley 2014, 45). The

problem still continues and India and Pakistan have fought at least three full-scale wars and one limited war attributed to the territorial contests. Actually Radcliffe himself realized the failure of his project and so he refused to accept the 40,000 rupees, which he was supposed to receive for this task (Butalia 1998).

It is interesting to note that people from Punjab having the same cultural and linguistic history were divided into Pakistan and India; and similarly Bengal was divided into West Bengal and East Pakistan. The state of Jammu and Kashmir became another bone of contention between India and Pakistan. The state was ruled by a Hindu king but the majority population was Muslim (Bajwa 2003, 21). Furthermore, Jammu and Kashmir was part of three sub-regions in which Jammu was a Hindu majority area. Based on the amount of Muslims in the area, Pakistan claimed and still claims that Jammu and Kashmir should be a part of Pakistan. However, the Hindu king of Jammu and Kashmir got his kingdom integrated into India and thus, New Delhi claims it to be a part of India. At the eastern side also, the division done was so abrupt and absurd that it was next to impossible to arrive at a reasonable solution to the boundary disputes.

India-China Territorial Disputes and the McMahon Line

The McMahon line divides India from Tibet and since Tibet is claimed to be part of China, the line is basically the source of the territorial dispute between India and China. Again, because of this boundary problem, India and China had a brief war in 1962 and there are speculations that in the 21st century a conflict between India and China might erupt on account of this dispute (Fairbank 1987). The line was decided in 1914 at the Shimla Accord and named after then Foreign Secretary of British India, Henry McMahon, who was the chief negotiator from the British Indian side. Earlier Britain negotiated with China regarding Tibet's boundaries with Burma and Sikkim, and when Tibet did not recognize these negotiations, in 1904 Britain invaded Tibet and imposed a treaty on them (Norbu 2001, 288). However, after three years, Britain renounced its position and said that it would only negotiate with China to decide on the matter of Tibet. However, in 1913 Tibet sent back all Chinese officials from Tibet and declared itself independent. It was a strategic opportunity for Britain to force its own boundary line on Tibet and thus, in Shimla, the representatives of Britain, Tibet, and China signed an accord. China claims that it did not give assent to the accord and Chinese representative in the talks just added their initials rather than full signatures to express their disagreement. Furthermore, even though the line was drawn in 1914, on paper it remained unenforceable on the ground and the actual demarcation had to wait for almost two decades. In 1937, the map published by the Survey of India showed that the McMahon Line was to be the official boundary between India and Tibet

and the next year, Britain claimed that even though Chinese consent was not clear, the Shimla Agreement was binding in nature. With the decolonization of India and the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the contest over China became more volatile and whereas India accepted the McMahon Line as the international boundary because it brought Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin into Indian territory, China categorically refused the validity of the Line (Neack 2003, 181). The McMahon Line has been an important source of tension between India and China from on.

The colonial origin of the territorial dispute is also very evident in the sense that from the very day of the boundary demarcation, the other two parties had not been committed to it. Actually, it was an act of imposition by Britain on the weaker China and Tibet and at that point in time, Britain, because of its power supremacy, was able to maintain the sanctity of the accord. However, when the British left India, the newly independent India did not have such an advantage; and China and Tibet started questioning the legality of the Shimla Accord. India in response tried to maintain the status quo which was advantageous for India and she still seeks the same (Miller 2013, 30). Actually, the historical variables such as dispute between China and Tibet over their relationship and the territorial claims make the matter quite complicated. It may be said that the 'original sin' in the case of territorial dispute between India, China and Tibet also began with the British intervention, which used its powerful position and imposed a territorial arrangement on weaker countries under duress.

In fact, it could be said that before the ascendancy of the British, South Asia was not acquainted with sharp borders and strict demarcations. When the notion and practice of borders, instead of frontiers was introduced, the region was dominated by the imperial power of Britain who was neither aware of the complexities of socio-cultural, ethnic connections nor wanted to have any say of these factors in drawing the new boundaries (Hewitt 1997, 63). Instead, an external power with very different motives accomplished the task and this was basically imposed on the native population. The immediate aftermath of most of these divisions might have been managed owing to the coercive supremacy of Britain, but once the imperial power left the region, the disputes among the natives became very problematic. Thus, it is interesting to note through the above analyses, that all the territorial disputes of South Asia had their origins in the colonial period; however, owing to the power of the British, the intensity of these disputes which was low then, became much more pronounced and bitter in the vacuum created after the departure of the British from the scene.

IS THERE ANY ESCAPE FROM COLONIAL ORIGINS?

Now after being informed of the ideological and practical variables in the colonial origins of the South Asian territorial disputes, one might investigate whether it is possible to resolve or manage these disputes in the contemporary scenario. In the postcolonial period, these disputes rather than getting less contested have become more complicated, as several other variables such as strategic importance, economic benefits and their use/misuse in domestic politics have given them a new saliency. The above discussion makes it clear that since the notion of sovereignty, nationalism and the splitting of natural cultural spaces into two states was done during the colonial era, which 'constructed' these boundary disputes; it would not be easy to overcome them. In reality, the South Asian region is caught in a situation wherein all national discourse is found a strong attachment to territory (Tuan 1974; Bacherlad 2014). However, at the same time most of these nationalities are randomly divided by these borders and many nationalities are put into one through these borders.

There are two important variables, which are linked to the border disputes phenomenon in our contemporary time: firstly, the unsettled domestic politics of the region and secondly, the increasing economic exchanges (or imperative of increasing economic exchanges) among the countries of the region. The first variable makes it difficult for these countries to realize the colonial origins of their territorial disputes and search for a reasonable solution. The domestic political discourse, which seems to be uncompromising on the issue of territory, makes it impossible to think of any resolution based on quid-pro-quo (Kapur 2011, 62). Yet the domestic discourse on the security in these countries is more influenced by the traditional notion of security in which territory is considered to be the core of their existence. In the last few decades, the notion of human security in which lives and welfare of people is more important than a piece of land has also been discussed but still at the popular level there has been no significant change in the status-quo (Barthwal-Datta 2012). With the rise and existence of rightist political parties in most of these countries, the boundary issues become further problematic, since some sort of sacred meaning and significance gets attached to it. Most of these rightist discourses in South Asian countries hardly look at the historical origins of these disputes and they rather deliberately ignore the colonial phase and go back to a selected era in their history in support of their claim. A discourse of humiliation is also being articulated but instead of pointing to the British as the 'culprit' of the humiliation, they try to blame one another, since this is what serves their political interests. Furthermore, since it is in the interest of the political forces to use the territorial disputes to garner domestic support and popularity,

they would rather not attempt to transcend them. Thus, the use and misuse of territory and boundary in domestic politics indicates that it is not easy to understand the colonial origins of these disputes and arrive at any contemporary resolution (Ghosh 1995, 215).

However, in the age of globalization, there are optimists, who feel that the boundary question is being looked at differently in various parts of the world and it is possible for the South Asian region to move in the same direction too. Actually globalization and the consequent dilution of the significance of the boundary could be the variable, which might pave the way for possible future resolutions of these territorial disputes in the South Asia. The basic problem of South Asian borders is that they are artificial and they separated local communities who had a long history of togetherness. More importantly, the search for sharp and watertight borders makes it impossible for people from one side of the border to continue their exchanges beyond these borders. As described in the previous section, in the pre-colonial period, the political entities in South Asia were divided by frontiers and not borders; and they were quite porous. If South Asia too devises regional and intra-regional trade and commerce through land routes and establishes connectivity across the region (Batra 2013, 19), it is possible that the colonial distortions in the cross-region exchanges could be restored. In the last two decades, there have been several proposals and plans such as regular road and rail connectivity between India-Pakistan, opening of more trade routes between India and China, and creating mechanisms such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) or The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation (BCIM). Success of these forums may change the course of territorial disputes in a very substantial way (Michael 2014). Actually, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which was established in 1985, though not very effective till date, could play an important role in the process. Thus, it could be said that the territorial disputes which had their origins in the colonial era have been trapped in a vicious cycle of contests and mutual blame games; and only an arrangement of cross-border exchanges and stake in stability and peace of the region could produce a virtuous cycle with its own momentum.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The South Asian territorial disputes are a product of colonization of the region by the British and imposition of new geographical and political categories for the benefits of the imperial power. The modern and alien ideas of territory, boundary,

sovereignty, and nationalism were introduced to the pre-modern society without sufficient care and consideration for the local realities. It might have its administrative logic in the broad colonial project or 'civilizing mission' but it ruptured the long existing connections and exchanges among various local communities spread across the region. The rupture at both physical and intangible levels, created fear and distortions, giving birth to many artificial political entities leading to incessant territorial disputes among them. Basically, the territorial disputes of South Asia, thus understood, are the 'construction' of the imperial power. Even before the advent of the British, there were a few fault lines in the South Asian region based on culture, religion, language, and ethnicity. But it was not possible for these to be articulated in territorial terms as many of these categories were distributed across the vast landmass of South Asia. Thus, even though these diversities had some disagreement with one another, there was a practical modus operandi to make them co-exist. The colonial enterprise rather than recognizing the complexities of these diversities and attempting to understand the same, imposed certain insensitive and instrumental solutions, which far from ameliorating these fault lines, made them further prone to conflict and struggle. Thus, it would not be incorrect to say that colonial origins are the most intractable variable in the contemporary territorial disputes of the South Asia.

In the post-colonial era, there has been a further introduction of new variables in the territorial disputes of the region and by and large, they have complicated them more. The process of nation/state building, which has not been very successful, and the lack of economic and social development, has further made these countries extra-sensitive about their territorial identities. The region has been mired in the primordial identity discourse, which puts highest value on the territorial integrity of a country. Rise of right-wing political parties in these countries also makes them more fixated in their territoriality. Since the level of literacy and education is low in these regions, the institution of democracy has, rather than being helpful to understand the colonial origins of these territorial disputes and work for resolution, become an instrument to invoke narrow nationalism and gain political support.

However, if an intra-regional mechanism of cooperation is devised and implemented, and re-connections of community across the borders becomes possible, it may lead to a transcendence of the distortions that were introduced in the region during the colonial period leading to these territorial disputes. In the contemporary age of globalization and regionalism, which has diverse effects in various regions, it may be expected that South Asia too might realize that a cooperative mechanism in regional politics would be helpful in economic and social development of the region.

Thus, it is important to delineate the existing territorial disputes in the region and recognize their colonial origins. Rather than blaming and contesting one another, it is pertinent to identify the real 'culprit'. Only then would it be possible for a peace mechanism to emanate in the regional politics leading to workable resolutions of these territorial disputes in the region.

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