

Seventy years ago, the United Nations recognized the birth of three new nations: Israel, India, and Pakistan. All three had just been given their independence from British colonialism: the Palestinian territory under British "mandate." India had been the "jewel in the crown" of the British Empire for 150 years. Pakistan was a brand-new country that was formerly north-eastern and north-western India. All three began their new lives with similarities and differences, the latter accounting for how well or badly each thrived as a modern democracy.

There would have been four new countries if the Palestinian Arabs had accepted the division of Palestine into two states, Israel and Palestine. They declined this offer and with the help of their many Arab neighbors, invaded the newly minted Israel to destroy it and take the entire land. They failed, and their bad decision has resulted in 70 years of conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, and no indication of democracy flowering among the Palestinians.

Their few elections have followed the pattern of one man, one vote, one time. The last election in the Gaza territory resulted in the election of Hamas, a Muslim extremist cult, which immediately hunted down and slaughtered their PLO rivals, the rival Palestinian party.

India, under the British Empire, had never been a "country." It was a patchwork of princely states, most sharing one religion, Hinduism, a very big-tent religion with multiple deities, ethnicities, and languages. Before the British came, half of the subcontinent was ruled by Persian Muslims, the Moghul Empire. The conquered people were so numerous and so resistant to conversion that the Moghuls became one of the more tolerant of Muslim rulers, unlike the Arab Muslim empire that swept north Africa, and ranged from Spain to Persia.

The Arab Muslims forced the largely Christian and Jewish populations to either convert, or pay extortionate annual taxes. Those formerly Roman lands were turned into deserts overnight.

When Britain emancipated India from their empire, they had educated an entire class of Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, in the institutions of Western civilization. English became the common tongue (there had been no common tongue before) and a whole generation of civilian and military leadership emerged, ready to run their new modern state. The military elites who were Muslim, however, although non-practicing and secular, did not trust a Hindu majority with treating Muslims equally. They demanded a separate identity as a new country, intending it to be secular, yet welcoming Indians of Muslim origin. East and West Pakistan were born at the same moment that modern India and modern Israel came to life.

These three nation-states began life with similarities: all professed secular governments with religious identity only historic and cultural. All lived in bad neighborhoods: Israel surrounded by hostile Muslim states; India and Pakistan at odds from the start and neighboring Russia and China. And none of the three had valuable natural resources to finance them.

The differences among Israel, India, and Pakistan over the next 70 years go far to explain their successes or failures with becoming modern participatory states (democracy). Israel enjoyed the benefit of universal literacy (this included Jews who fled from Europe and those expelled from Muslim countries). Literacy has not done as well in India or Pakistan, the consequence of pious religious practices and dreadful public education. In Pakistan, there is no public education at all. The elites enjoy private European-style schools and the rest have to make do with Muslim brainwashing Madrassas, memorizing the Koran.

Pakistan's secular governance is under threat by militant Islam, population explosion, and civil violence.

Literacy lags in all of India's rural villages, and feudalism still lives on, but urban India is making strides, if the newly Militant Hinduism does not undo them.

Israel's per capita GDP of \$40,000 ranks with Italy and South Korea. They have eight living Nobel Prize winners, and a vibrant high-tech sector, despite few natural resources. Secular governance and high western standards have made the difference. Israelis must also protect their secular state from their own religious sector, a threat to modernity everywhere.

683 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of God's Law or Man's Law. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.