

**IT IS HARDLY SURPRISING THAT PREJUDICE TOWARDS
PAKISTAN CUTS ACROSS IDEOLOGICAL LINES, AND
THE DISCOURSE OF PEACE THAT DIFFERENT POLITICAL
FORMATIONS ESPOUSE IS ALSO UNIFORM**

Indo-Pak relations are characterized by a maze of feelings, thoughts and suspicions that have been used to justify chronic distrust and war by successive generations on both sides of the border. The author of the critically acclaimed *Prejudice and Pride* explores the foundations of the conflict between India and Pakistan, and examines the prospects of peace in South Asia with a refreshing new perspective. Old platitudes are scrutinized with an uncompromising eye and the complex layers of hostility, prejudice, fear and the reluctance to reconcile are looked at afresh.

Krishna Kumar touches upon a range of contexts, such as the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, the role of the media in shaping the path to peace, and the violence in Kashmir. The reader is invited to contemplate important questions: Why was the Father of our nation killed? Why has no textbook of Indian history ever bothered to deal with that question? How do the legacies of Gandhi and Jinnah affect us to this day?

This is an introspective and thought-provoking book from which emerges a persuasive argument for peace, while the rhetoric of a romantic past is rejected. It will doubtless offer new ways of looking at this historic conflict to anyone who seeks a deeper, more constructive understanding of it.

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BATTLE



FOR PEACE

By the author of the critically acclaimed
Prejudice and Pride

Krishna Kumar

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BATTLE FOR PEACE

Krishna Kumar's critically acclaimed book, *Prejudice and Pride*, was published by Penguin India in 2001. His other works include *Political Agenda of Education*, *Learning from Conflict*, *The Child's Language and the Teacher* and *What Is Worth Teaching*. He has authored several books in Hindi, and also writes for children. A professor of education at the University of Delhi, he is currently the director of the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT).

Battle for Peace

KRISHNA KUMAR



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For Kajal

Introduction

Sameness vs. difference is the familiar axis of Indo-Pak dialogue, or what little there is of it. As Indians, we intuitively choose similarities between the two countries as our ground for seeking peace. This choice looks so obvious to us that we cannot understand how anyone might resent it. We find ample evidence of our claim in language, music, food habits, common reflexes, and so on. In terms of these elements of culture, aren't India and Pakistan extremely similar or close to each other, we ask. We propose this grand finding as the ground to demand peace. The possibility that some Pakistanis might actually feel unhappy with our insistence that similarity is a sound basis for peaceful coexistence sounds bizarre. We end up befriendng the selected Pakistanis who agree with the similarity argument. But even these chosen ones feel bewildered and nervous, even suspicious, as the dialogue advances. This discomfort is reminiscent of the pre-1947 days when Indian leaders opposed to Partition were pleading with their pro-Partition counterparts to stop insisting that we were two nations.

Partition took place despite these pleas. Over the long decades since Partition, Pakistan has tried to establish itself

as a modern nation which can claim to be different from India. This effort gained urgency and intensity following the 1971 war when Pakistan lost a major limb of its geographical and cultural body. Young Pakistanis socialized in the late 1970s and afterwards wonder why Indians don't notice their country's desire and efforts to be different from India. The expectation that India should recognize and respect the effort is an aspect of Pakistan's search for a stable and strong national identity. It is also the extension of an old emotional strain which sustains Pakistan's search for modernity. This strain finds its resonance in the larger tension with Western modernity that Islam, as an organized religion, is negotiating. But the Pakistani question addressed to Indians—Why don't you accept us as different and equally worthy of respect?—usually remains unspoken. If it were articulated, the Indian side would ignore it, and the Pakistani who made the mistake of articulating it would feel further embarrassed and angry.

One encounters this imaginary dialogue in different and nuanced forms, depending on the background and class of the participants from the two sides. Punjabis from across the border hug with customary vitality, replacing words with the familiar body language of a common culture, ignoring the implications tightly woven around the hug. Urban middle-class visitors to Pakistan from the Hindi-Urdu heartland wonder how long it would take for the dominant Punjabis to understand the complexity of all that happened in the mid-1940s and since. Working-class Pakistanis give the impression that money and Indian movies matter more than Pakistan, but they do not mean it. Each time I have talked to schoolchildren in Pakistan, I have realized that they are

the true representatives of the future. Their discourse reveals that their nation has come to stay. Difficult though it is, we have to appreciate that Pakistan might have been similar to us once, but it is different from us now.

This book is about the reasons for this position and the challenge it presents to our efforts for peace. Some of my arguments are derived from history, some from the domestic processes active in the two countries. This analysis is expected to help the reader gain peace within as a first step towards peace with a neighbour for whom our feelings range from indifference to disgust. The idea that peace within is necessary for peace outside is not new, but it constitutes an uncharted dimension in the context of Indo-Pak dialogue because neither country has had reasons or occasion to introspect. The fact that Partition occurred on the basis of religion, though its genesis was political, poses a sensitive, spiritual challenge for peace. Religion makes a deep claim on identity, and although Hinduism is not the only defining feature of India's modern identity, it is an important aspect of how we react to the idea and existence of Pakistan. As for Pakistan, its Muslimness needs no explanation, though it is now an established fact that Islam has not proved sufficient as a resource for Pakistan's quest for identity. Given the importance of religion in these somewhat different ways for both countries, it follows that peace may require change in our beliefs and knowledge about the 'other'. Awareness of our own deepest thoughts can give us the flexibility to be Hindus without hating Pakistani Muslims though they live in a country established with so much violence; and a parallel flexibility to be Muslims without hating Hindus though they

have not stopped resenting Pakistan for a variety of reasons. Religion-based layers of identity are harder to negotiate, especially when modern education socializes us into the religion of secularism, which claims deeper roots in reason than any religion can. This is how we turn indifferent towards the need to engage with different religions.

To replace the sameness vs. difference axis, I propose that India and Pakistan should recognize the larger scene of which they are a part. This scene is popularly as well as academically addressed these days under the fuzzy but useful name of 'globalization'. What meaning we attribute to it depends on our particular assumptions regarding economic policies, and changes in technology and culture. This is a vast matter, but it directly affects how any one of us watches and interprets the daily news. Aren't India and Pakistan sailing in the same boat in the context of the pervasive changes taking place in the global economic order, technology and culture? The metaphor can perhaps be updated and given greater meaning if we replace the proverbial boat with an aeroplane, for the world is changing far too rapidly for leisurely contemplation or agreement on how different countries are coping with the speed of change. Even those who perceive speed to be a sign of progress don't quite know how to settle or intervene in fundamental debates arising out of the debris of social theories. It will undoubtedly take the social sciences a long time to analyse the changes that have occurred since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the availability of the Internet for civilian use, to refer to just two signposts of global change. One thing does, however, look somewhat clear, and that is the renewal of colonial-style brazenness in the

mighty and their urge to reorder the world so that colonial hegemonies sustain.

The debate on this process promises to be shrill and long, but it need not prevent us from noticing the thrust of corporate culture and ideology in countries like India and Pakistan. In neither case can we fail to spot the extent to which the role of the state as a custodian of external and internal security has grown at the expense of its role in human welfare. Signs of this change are evident in both India and Pakistan, though the spread of these signs forms a somewhat differential pattern, given the difference in the social, political and economic landscapes. The privatization and commercialization of foundational services like health and education has been advancing on an unprecedented scale in the recent past, hitting the poverty-stricken masses hardest in both countries. Now, in education, this process is about to cover liberal higher education, signalling the entry of global corporate players in the innermost orbit of cultural regeneration. This is the orbit where knowledge is exchanged, enhanced and designed.

In Pakistan, this domain has been in a highly eroded condition since the damaging Zia years. In India, the process of corporatization is intensifying somewhat belatedly and facing some predictable resistance. The larger context is identical for both countries. The determination of global corporate powers, fully entrenched in certain nation states of the wealthier world, to treat knowledge as a commodity forms this larger context. Not that knowledge was not a commodity earlier, but this time we are witnessing the refusal to acknowledge other dimensions to knowledge. To argue that the trend is endemic to capitalism is to miss the specific historical crisis that the

former colonies are facing. Taken in by the selective signs of India's capacity to cope with the crisis, we would also miss the grim and gloomy implications that the reduction of knowledge into being treated exclusively as a commodity has for education and all other awareness-building agencies. Without their survival, growth and reform, peace has little chance to become a social and state priority in South Asia. If India and Pakistan are to respond effectively to the challenges arising from this global and explicitly political calamity, they can only do so together. Weren't they the first among the colonized to gain freedom by intellectual means? The semiology of togetherness at the historical moment of our birth as modern nations represents a great potential for resisting the prospect of South Asia's knowledge and culture being misappropriated. It is no less than a civilizational crisis which has already begun to reduce South Asia—a vaster cultural space, extending beyond the malnourished body of SAARC—into becoming an endemically violent region. The saturation of South Asia with modern, imported arms is fully underway. In the strained condition of our minds, as we watch this and related processes, it is important for us to imagine a future in which both India and Pakistan can coexist with dignity. Peace is always an act of imagination, whereas war is a matter of preparedness. In an unusual Hindi film, *Veer-Zaara*, we come face-to-face with this nature of peace. The film is about a love affair that succeeds, but not before long years of the hero's and also the heroine's youth are wasted in a terrible drama of helplessness framed by the Indo-Pak conflict. The message this film has is unusual, because its story does not talk about reunification; rather, it explores reconciliation in an indeterminate future.

I

Birla House and Rajghat

At the end of our excursion to Birla House, where Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, one of my students said she wanted to ask a question. We had spent about an hour ambling through the picture gallery. Prior to that, we had meditated for about ten minutes a few metres away from the spot where Gandhi had fallen on 30 January 1948. The spot carries no sign with any historical details. Only the date and Gandhi's last words, 'Hey Ram', are engraved on a small, shiny brown stone pillar. Neither the numbers, nor the letters are well-designed. Indeed, you are struck by the lack of sophistication in the engraver's hand, and if you are visiting the place for the first time, you cannot avoid wondering for a passing moment why a better artist was not chosen to do the job. The pillar stands under a tiny, modest canopy which is probably meant to protect the pillar and the spot from the sun and rain. All around is a reasonable lawn; not lush, as they have in many of the ministerial bungalows in the vicinity in every direction, and not just in the Claridges Hotel next door. Once again, you wonder why the grass is not better maintained. Embedded in what grass

there is, you notice a long series of cement footsteps going all the way from the canopy to the building across the lawn, to the room from which Gandhi emerged in order to walk slowly to the place of his murder.

The cement steps are apparently an attempt to assist the visitor's imagination. What about the crowd waiting to hear Gandhi that evening? Looking at the lawn and the spring flowers, it is difficult to picture the scene in the winter of 1948 in a city exhausted by riots and refugees. The cement steps look firm and shapely as they stand slightly above the malnourished grass. Perhaps they would help schoolchildren who visit this place to work out Gandhi's path from his room to the spot where the pillar and the canopy stand.

My students were all in their early twenties. I had wondered if they thought the cement steps were a little silly. I noticed one of them walking alongside the steps to the room they led to, and looking a little disappointed that the door Gandhi had used was locked. It was open from the other side: the official side. After all, this was a museum, with an official entrance and exit, the usual sullen staff, blissfully unaware of how jarring their behaviour looked in a place as sombre as this. One of them, a tall, manly figure dressed in white khadi, had loudly shouted for a full ten minutes at his juniors. While he was screaming and livid, I had a strong impulse to ask him to consider the impression he was giving to his foreign visitors. A few tourist companies have included Birla House in their daily bus rides. A bus had just arrived when the senior official started shouting. Something stopped me from interrupting him. I suppose it was the thought that truth must prevail. Gandhi had said, reproduced in the

quotation painted on one of the display panels, that he had nothing new to teach, for truth and non-violence were as ancient as the hills. Anger and violence in a museum associated with him were not new to me. Years ago, I had witnessed the slapping of two children inside the picture gallery of Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad. Their crime was that they had slowed down to look at one of the panels while the rest of their classmates had been shooed forward by their resolute teacher.

As there had not been any questions since our entry into Birla House, I was happy to hear that there was one now. I warmly asked what it was, telling the others to be attentive so that we could all discuss it. The student said she wanted to know why Gandhiji was shot. Noticing that I was a little flustered, she added that she knew *who* had killed Gandhiji, but *why* she did not know. The question was highly relevant to our surroundings that moment, but I felt inconsolably frustrated and tired, though it was quite early in the day.

I was aware by now that this was the first time this group, barring one student, had visited this place. Two of them had told me in the picture gallery that they had not even known that such a place existed. The girl who had followed the concrete footsteps wondered aloud why her school had never brought her here. 'They took us to Rajghat, but why not here?' she asked. I replied that this was something worth thinking about. What could I say about why Gandhiji was killed, without showing my surprise that this question was being asked by college graduates about to become teachers. Even this I could not honestly ask, for I knew why they did not know, and why they were not supposed to know. This last bit of knowledge has been the most disappointing of all,

over the decade during which I have been interested in this problem.

I remember my own first visit to Birla House in the early 1980s. It annoyed me in the following years that the place remained so little known; why it was not important enough to be seen by visitors to Delhi, I realized only gradually. There was a meaning in this neglect, and the contest between Rajghat and Birla House hid a deep hole in India's modern mind.

Whereas Birla House was quite unfamiliar and new to my students, Rajghat was just the opposite. They had been taken to Rajghat more than once by their school, and they had read, in newspapers, about the ritual visits that important politicians and foreign dignitaries made to it. In any case, Rajghat was, for many, a part of their daily negotiation with Delhi's urban geography, located as it was on Ring Road—known to painters of road signs as Mahatma Gandhi Road—and, therefore, on a very common bus route. However, my students' unfamiliarity with Birla House could not be attributed to its location alone. To believe that would amount to ignoring a silent agreement that has shaped India's civic life since Gandhi's assassination. The two parties involved in the agreement can be viewed as rival socio-historical configurations vying for cultural hegemony and political control since long before Gandhi's murder. We can conveniently identify the configurations with the help of two well-established ideological labels: pluralistic secularism and religious or cultural nationalism, but the moment we do so, we run into the long and ongoing debate over the meaning of pluralistic secularism. Those who are identified with the latter term have never accepted their ineligibility to be viewed

as representatives of the former term. Over the recent years, the 'cultural nationalists' have been saying that they are the real secularists, and that those who have been calling themselves secular are hypocrites, or 'pseudo-secular'. This shrill debate is so integral an aspect of contemporary political life that I need not dwell on it and, in any case, my real purpose is to discuss the silent agreement that has shaped the relationship between the two camps so far as the public significance of Rajghat, and its absence at Birla House is concerned.

It is not merely young students or children who are *not* taken to see the spot where Gandhi was assassinated. It is also the case that heads of foreign governments are taken to Rajghat, and not Birla House. Nor do India's ruling politicians visit Birla House to pay homage to Gandhi on his birth and death anniversaries, or on Independence Day. This protocol is reserved for Rajghat. Is this a matter of chance or choice?

It can hardly be argued that the place where someone was cremated is given special significance in Hinduism. The opposite is true, except in the case of Maharajas, whose *chattris* can be seen in several north Indian forts. Great yogis and saints do have samadhis, but they are literally *in samadhi*, i.e., they are buried, not cremated there. In Delhi, apart from Rajghat, the spots where Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Sanjay and Rajiv Gandhi, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and Charan Singh were cremated have gained a peculiar status. Indeed, the choice of this stretch of Ring Road for nationally significant cremations has posed difficulties arising from competitive politics, and not just the problem of finding space

in the neighbourhood of Gandhi and Nehru along the banks of the Yamuna. Rajghat is, of course, special, and has an ambience of its own. Its simple design, especially its vast openness, captures Gandhi's trusting demeanour a little too explicitly. Any symbolic distance between the man and the monument is further reduced by the handful of trees of varying heights standing in homely isolation and forming no pattern. The surrounding low veranda was perhaps designed to convey Gandhi's preference of a simple lifestyle, and this message too is now somewhat exaggerated by the conspicuous presence, in parts of the veranda, of poles and other material used to erect shamanas when VIPs arrive on important days to publically spin khadi and listen to Gandhi's favourite bhajans. From the road, one approaches the main quadrangle through what looks like a tunnel, but in reality is no more than a longish, upwardly sloped passage leading to the entrance, where one is asked to take off one's shoes and pay a fee in order to ensure their safe return. Barring this, Rajghat charges no fee, but at the main site of Gandhi's cremation a charity box sits next to the shiny, black thick square-shaped stone. This is the heart of Rajghat. One sees visitors standing with folded hands, some kneeling, their children looking on, wondering perhaps if this is a temple. The place does have a religious feel to it, and rightly so, considering that Gandhi was a Mahatma. But then he was a political leader too, and Rajghat is supposed to be a *national* monument, architecturally and environmentally responsible for conveying Gandhi's idea of India, not just his personal spiritual journey.

As you walk back towards the Ring Road and catch a line of the devotional song being played on a cheap cassette

player at the official bookstore, you inevitably catch the impression of poverty and neglect. India is not known for sophistication in the upkeep of historical monuments, and Rajghat is no exception. Nor is it an exception in being a part of the law-and-order state that India continues to be, long after colonial rule. A prominent display board forbids visitors from using the place for activities like eating, playing, spreading garbage, displaying banners or holding meetings. The last item in the long list comprises 'any other undesirable activity'. In this respect too, Rajghat seems designed to isolate the spiritual, saintly Gandhi from his political, historical self, for we all know he was fond of meetings and demonstrations, and had a special fondness for activities that powerful people might consider undesirable.

Rajghat communicates the death of a devout man. His association with history is absent, not just because there is no signboard containing historical dates or other details. History looks irrelevant at Rajghat. Nothing in its assiduously crafted openness reminds us that Gandhi was violently eliminated by a man who had rationalized his intense hatred for him, and who felt that Gandhi was responsible for many unforgivable wrongs, the gravest one being India's partition. Rajghat raises no curiosity or questions in one's mind. All it does is make one aware of a reality larger than life and death. It offers peace of mind because it arouses no disturbing thoughts or questions about the nation to which Gandhi dedicated his life. Rajghat helps us cope with Gandhi's assassination by assigning him martyrdom. When Gandhi is described as a martyr, a battle-like dignity is imparted to his mode of dying. Forget about his non-soldierly style of fighting

for a moment; did he die fighting or was he simply cruelly murdered? The artless peace offered to the visitor at Rajghat has no room for such disturbing queries.

Quite the opposite is true of Birla House. Its graceful, somewhat familiar architecture invites an immediate curiosity about its history. The impression of familiarity has to do with the mixture of styles. My friend and historian, Narayani Gupta, calls it a haveli designed to 'fit in' and to offer a comfortable place to live in post-Lutyen's Delhi. Having compared it to Birla havelis in Rajasthan, I find this an apt description. As one walks through the gates to the lawn at the back where Gandhi fell, the awareness of space and time arrests one's mind. The inset space to your right invokes the memory of a courtyard, but you realize instantly that it is not. The building is just a little too modern to have a courtyard. It is an original structure, designed to cope with a changing material and symbolic reality. Inside, the curved staircase is reminiscent of a haveli, while the lawn at the back could be that of any Lutyen's bungalow. As you appreciate the lawn and the flower-beds around it, the big question—why Gandhi should have met this fate—germinates numerous other curiosities—how could someone hate this old man so intensely; who was the killer; how did he justify himself, and so on. No visitor to Birla House can avoid letting such questions come to mind, and they inevitably force one's attention towards the continued relevance and strange freshness of Gandhi's violent death. This is understandably the biggest difference between Rajghat and Birla House: one seems eternal and, therefore, with no immediate bearing on the passing moment; the other acts as a painful reminder

that modern India is still in the making and has not emerged from the battle in which Gandhi lost his life.

Surprisingly little has been written about Gandhi's murder compared to all that has been written about his life and ideas. There is just not enough research and other writing to help us analyse the drama of his killing. If one sifts through the literature that exists, one gets the distinct impression that the assassination of Gandhi was not an act one could see as a task accomplished once and for all. The trial of Gandhi's principal killer and his colleagues was a tense political event, and a lot of evidence indicates that the killers were not interested in merely making a point. They were aware that they had many sympathizers, and were keen to leave behind a legacy of anxiety about their deed. The statements they made—Nathuram Godse's was particularly elaborate—and all that their lawyers said while trying to defend them carried the marks of a much larger battle of ideas than what the immediate end of an old man's life might encapsulate. Birla House prompts the mind to recall that battle and its current news. It ceases to be a monument then and becomes what it once was: an active field office of Gandhi's. The lawyer Tapan Ghosh was right in concluding his book-length memoir about Gandhi's murder with the feeling that a shadow hangs over Birla House: is it Godse's or is it the spectre of communalism?, Ghosh asks at the end of his book.¹

Godse's critique of Gandhi was long, and it is not my purpose to summarize it. His biggest charge was that Gandhi was responsible for India's partition. Numerous arguments and a personalized narrativization of events enabled Godse to make this charge. The most important argument was that

Gandhi was pro-Muslim; he took Hindus for granted and ignored their interests. A parallel argument was that Gandhi's non-violence was an eccentricity which proved expensive for the nation. The sweep of Godse's remarks leaves hardly any major national concern untouched. For instance, on the question of India's national language, Godse charges Gandhi with promoting what he calls the 'prostitution of Hindi' by the inclusion of Urdu instead of Sanskrit words. In Godse's perception, Gandhi was the architect of a grand and tragic deception, and his stature allowed him to impose the deception on a suffering, innocent people. Partition is the most hurtful of all the acts Godse attributes to Gandhi's agency. Howsoever great Gandhi was, he says, even he had no right to break up the country. Godse presents his case for murdering Gandhi by saying that he knew that no court would have punished Gandhi for his deeds; therefore someone had to take it upon himself to do it.

What makes Godse's self-confident statement to the court a sad document is the absence of any opening in it for self-doubt, let alone repentance. Indeed, he maintained a high-profile unrepentant attitude all the way to the gallows, and this is what makes Godse an ideological killer. Reading his statement enables us to understand the correct meaning of the word 'ideology'—a system of thought which has no opening for thinking. That Godse was neither crazy nor a fanatic, but an example of what an ideology can do to the mind is a major insight that a visit to the spot where Gandhi fell triggers each time. Birla House reminds us that a man as simple and transparent as Gandhi was killed by intention, and without second thought. The curiosity to know the reason

behind this act pushes the visitor to face familiar questions on Partition and Hindu-Muslim relations. These questions have lingered on, and they regularly resurface when we hear that a riot has been prevented somewhere by timely action on the part of civil authority. How long can we go on like this, one wonders, without any specific picture of a future time when ordinary people will have a steadier life, and a frame of mind capable of resisting the provocation to kill and destroy.

If you are even marginally inclined towards the revivalist line of thought, you are likely to be further encouraged in your thinking by a visit to Birla House. You will come back home ruminating on the compulsions under which India must find its way forward, the price of Partition having been ruthlessly extracted at a crucial point in our national journey. On the other hand, if you are sceptical of revivalist cultural nationalism as an ideology, you are likely to return from Birla House with greater fervour to uphold futuristic modernism, which suggests that history helps when it is left behind. Birla House makes one suspicious that we have a major problem in that there is still—more than half a century after Independence—no consensus in India about its basis. That Godse's idea of India was quite different from Gandhi's—so different that Godse could not tolerate the possibility of Gandhi living any further than he did—is a fact, but Birla House makes it come alive as a living, continuing threat. That is why, one might guess, it has been deemed safer to take foreign dignitaries and schoolchildren to Rajghat instead of Birla House. The implication of this guess or feeling is no less pervasive. If India is to overcome

the shock of Partition, to perceive it as history—tragic, but history all the same, which *can* be understood and lived with—then more people must visit Birla House. They must go there to learn, as directly as one can imagine learning, why Gandhi's life ended with a pistol. By visiting Rajghat one merely renews one's urge to avoid an engagement with history. This is a far more common stance than one might like to imagine, and its popularity owes in no small measure to a flawed and callous system of education.

The poor state of education is nowhere more manifest than in the teaching of history, especially in the textbooks written for schoolchildren. They are, with rare exceptions, written as compendiums of facts: dates, names and sketchy narratives of events. A great deal of public controversy is routinely raised on what is included or dropped, and on the relative authenticity of the facts included, but few people seem to bother about the absence of basic pedagogic awareness and the lack of imagination characteristic of our textbooks. Most of them convey the feeling that their writers do not understand children, and do not consider it relevant to arouse and develop children's curiosities about the past. All they do is tell what happened, and even this bit of duty the writers of textbooks perform without the ingenuity to draw the larger picture with small details that might enable children to absorb the significance of an event. Every event gets the same brief treatment, Gandhi's assassination being no exception. No Indian textbook tries to explain why Gandhi was killed. No textbook writer asks children to find out or guess what might have impelled the assassin. Even the rudimentary pedagogic step of providing a map of Birla House

with a photograph to whet the imagination, so that children might visualize the evening when Gandhi was killed, is not taken. In fact, some writers simply omit Gandhi's assassination as a topic; others have the courtesy to make a mention of it in the cursory, routine manner in which they mention everything else. No one has the temerity to prioritize it as an event deserving special treatment, for after all it involves the physical elimination of the Father of the Nation.

This common state of textbooks is matched by the general character of teacher training. The recent onslaught of commercial single-mindedness has merely added a layer to the pile of reasons which impel one to feel somewhat cynical. The training of teachers, unreformed as it is, makes remarkably little effort to encourage reflection. Visits to monuments do figure in training manuals, but what precisely might be done to distinguish such a visit from a picnic is ignored. Rajghat is a favourite 'history' picnic spot; Birla House is not. No wonder most children have an unpleasant memory of their history classes at school. It is also not surprising that when these children become adults they remain vulnerable to the power of propaganda on matters as crucial for peace and survival as the nature of India's society, and its relations with its next-door neighbour.

Even if I had wanted to, I did not know where to begin answering the question my student had asked. I wanted her to appreciate that there was no simple answer to the question of why Gandhi was assassinated. I wanted her to hold the question in her mind. As we walked through the bookstore at the entrance of Birla House, where a biography of V.D. Savarkar happened to be prominently displayed that

day, I wondered if I could recommend her a book to pursue her curiosity. I looked at the titles peeping through the glass cases and was reminded that little scholarly work existed on Gandhi's assassination. Could I ask her to read Gandhi's life story and other books about his work and philosophy? Perhaps I could, but I knew that reading about Gandhi's life and philosophy would not satisfactorily explain why he was killed by an unimpressed Hindu. The question of why Gandhi incurred so much active anger will remain, for the anger has not died out. The belief continues that Gandhi could have prevented Partition. Selective information about the history of the 1940s, combined with the stereotype of Gandhi as a political magician, has convinced successive generations that he allowed Partition to take place. His use of religious symbols to mobilize the masses is seen as a major initial mistake, later compounded by strategic moves which let the Muslim League gain a tactical advantage. The tendency to attribute to Gandhi an agency of historic proportions has exacerbated the hesitation to ask why the emotional distance between Hindus and Muslims widened since the 1930s in northern India. When it comes to Partition, even those who emphasize social origins of political outcomes deny agency to public perceptions and interests. Official Indian history, in any case, does not permit Partition to be portrayed as a necessity of its time; the only acceptable line is that it violated the civilizational character of India, which is enshrined in independent India's political character. The anger over Partition is, thus, maintained.

So long as we are angry about Partition, Gandhi must take a large amount of blame for it in the secret corners of our mind. We have two options: either we must stop being

upset about Partition or stop treating Gandhi as a political magician. In her book *Independence and Partition*, Sucheta Mahajan takes the second option and demonstrates why this is valid.² She offers sufficient evidence to prove that large sections of the people desired Partition, and Gandhi was actually aware of this widespread desire. His knowledge of the public mind was as sharp as ever, and this is why he saw no hope of Partition being averted. This perspective is very different from the one cultivated over decades by educational means, with plentiful support from cinema. If the perspective we gain from Mahajan's work gathers energy and popularity, we may one day see Rajghat for what it is—a place to hide from history, an architectural trivia to distract ourselves from the taxing homework we must do to build the foundations of peace in South Asia. The favour shown to Rajghat over Birla House might then look like an unnecessary political and diplomatic affliction. The symbolic distance between the two monuments is a marker of India's continued ambivalence about what it should do with Gandhi. We cherish having him as a symbol of dedication to the nation, but we hardly own him as a symbol which reminds us of a domestic struggle. His disciple and pedagogue, the late Marjorie Sykes, celebrated his 'gift of the fight', but few people today recall or appreciate that Gandhi's fight was hardly confined to the aim of freedom from colonial rule.³ That his fight was also for social peace poses a difficult challenge today, when we remember that India and Pakistan both possess nuclear bombs and are developing the means of delivering them to their desired destinations.

Places have the power to settle the mind and turn it

towards untried angles of light. When German children visit the Holocaust Museum in Berlin, or when Japanese children visit the Museum of Peace in Hiroshima, they absorb something inconvenient and new about their national identity, something vital for its sustenance and growth. Birla House has the same potential—to make young Indians more aware of the emotional challenge they have inherited from Gandhi; to cherish one's own identity without deriding the other. Identity gives us an energy we can use either to sharpen our edges or, alternatively, to realize our goals in the recognition of the other, as Tagore put it in *The Religion of Man*. When Gandhi died facing a fellow believer in Hinduism who shot at him, he symbolized the folly of distinguishing those who are similar to us from those who are different. In the moment of his violent death, Gandhi overcame the bonds of familiarity as the principle of relatedness. When we visit Birla House, we enjoy a chance to learn that who we think we are has hardly any importance in determining what will happen to us.⁴

II

Litter in Lahore

As adults we hesitate to discuss conflict with children because we feel it is not a suitable topic for them. Our urge to protect and preserve their innocence for as long as possible restrains us from mentioning anything to do with conflict when we are in the company of children. This is true not only of parents, but also of teachers, though they are trained to work with children and should know how to broach any topic, howsoever unpleasant, with them. As professionally trained adults, teachers should also know that conflict is hardly an alien subject for children; that, on the contrary, children have a natural urge to understand conflict and to seek or, at least, imagine a resolution. The desire to live in an orderly world, and to restore order if it has been disrupted, is fundamental to childhood. And the desire is understandably strong when children are surrounded by conflict. No child in any part of the world is protected from the news of conflict thanks to television; but millions of children also directly witness conflict and participate in it. They see violent riots erupting in the streets where they live. In societies facing chronic wars between ethnic groups or

tribes, children are recruited and trained to fight side by side with adults. And we can hardly estimate the number of children who watch conflict between their parents and, at times, become victims of the violence that usually targets the mother. Whatever the mode of their exposure to conflict, children are always interested and forthcoming when an adult wants to discuss with them a subject involving conflict.

There is a difference between dealing with such a subject in the company of children as opposed to adults. Conflict and peace can prove quite tiring as topics for discussion with adults. They take positions as soon as the discussion starts, and then the best part of their energies go into defending their respective positions. The discourse repetitiously veers between the exclamation of sentiments for peace with frequent references to the past on one hand, and the jungle of details which justify war on the other. When children discuss peace and war they stay playful and earthy, willing to take and switch sides according to the strength of an argument. In the course of one evening, I have seen fifteen-year-olds changing their stand half-a-dozen times. As adults we tend to regard this as a sign of immaturity, but we might also see it as a sign of flexibility in the face of persuasive logic. It is pointless to remind a child what he or she had said fifteen minutes ago. Children readily allow an argument to evolve till it gathers a lobby; and they don't mind if the lobby falls apart half-an-hour later. As an outsider to their world, the adult who is moderating the discussion might think they are behaving like pieces of glass bangles placed in a kaleidoscope. But if we see this behaviour from the children's perspective, it is like catching a view of the surroundings of

an old monument from its numerous windows, one by one, and noticing, without feeling self-conscious, how different the scene looks each time.

As an adult, you feel lost and at times confused about the direction of the debate. If your purpose was to orient the audience towards conflict-resolution or peace, you rightly wonder if you have achieved anything as you witness the shaky movement of the discussion, its wide sweep, and its unpredictability. However, if you let it go on long enough, the wealth of ideas and insights generated, and the metaphors used to size up the topic impress and reassure you.

To a great extent, the same applies to children's writing on conflict. When I was working on my first book, *Prejudice and Pride*, I had obtained a bunch of short essays written by class IX children in Lahore on the topic of the division of India and Pakistan.¹ I acquired a larger bunch from children studying in the same class in schools in Delhi. I wanted to think comparatively about the ways in which present day youngsters of the two countries reconstructed the past. I was especially keen to see how they negotiated the time-distance since 1947, and I was impressed by the wide-ranging positions they took on how the implications of Partition have unfolded for Indo-Pak relations. I devoted a full chapter in my book to reporting the details of my analysis, but an essay written by a girl from Lahore remained fresh in my mind, leaving me unsatisfied with my analysis. Her essay included an introspective question which had several layers of resonance. I decided to unravel some of these layers by examining Pakistan's history as a teenager in Lahore might perceive it. To say that this attempt would enable the reader to

understand a young Pakistani's mind is no exaggeration, but to claim that this exercise might also throw some light on the *national* mind that education helps to shape, in collaboration with other agencies of socialization, may well look like an oversimplification. The inadequacy of data—just one child's writing—may be rightly cited to justify this criticism. Also, the idea of a 'national' mind is now out of fashion, if not discredited, as a remnant of Hegel's theory that each nation has its own special spirit. Whether Hegel was right or wrong can be debated, but if one looks at modern systems of education—and they are all national systems—one notices that they use knowledge and pedagogic methods to construct a national mind.

We like to believe that national identities are a weak or declining force in today's globalizing world. Advancements in the technology of communication, especially the availability of the Internet for the general public since the mid-1990s (the US military has been using it for a lot longer), have reinforced the impression that national borders are no longer hard or relevant. The size of diaspora from several Third World societies is another source of this perception. Its error can be judged by realizing the aggressive form nationalism has taken in the case of the world's lone superpower and the biggest ex-colonizer, the US and UK respectively. Arguably, both have a large dissenting public, but the perception that their countries are at war in Iraq for a legitimate reason has gained acceptance in a large proportion of the population in both these nations.

If as an ideology, nationalism seemed to be on the decline in the so-called developed world in the aftermath of the Soviet

break-up in the 1990s, we can hardly miss its assertive resurgence in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. Nationalism can hardly be declared to have become an obsolete historical force when the world's most powerful country is repeatedly reminding its own citizens (and others) that it invaded a country geographically far away from it in order to disseminate some of its own key national values, such as freedom and democracy. These values are projected as 'global' or 'universal' values in order to cover the national interests to be served by the invasion of Iraq. Seen this way, globalization looks like a smokescreen for pursuing familiar, narrow national interests. As Indians, we find globalization a tantalizing yet paradoxical proposition. It promises economic opportunities, and the eventual acceptance of our status as a global power. At the same time, we feel at times threatened by the cultural face of globalization. Many argue that behind the homogenizing force of globalization stands the hegemonic agenda of the US. Such a thought invokes cultural nationalism—of the same kind that the demand for Pakistan was based on.

It is a widely held view that Pakistan's self-identity is weakly formed, that Pakistan's viability as an independent nation state stands in constant danger because of its poorly formed national identity. It is true that its national identity has been a matter of anxiety, for its own people and for others too; and for precisely that reason, educational policy in Pakistan has focussed so consistently on socializing the young into a strong belief in Pakistan's nationhood. The idea of a 'national mind' offers us an attractive criterion to judge the outcome of Pakistan's educational and cultural policies.

The question is how to examine Pakistan's national mind. Studying the intriguing resonance of a teenager's remark presents one way, inadequate though it obviously is. The statement in the girl's essay that woke me up was that when she saw litter on the streets of Lahore she wondered if *this* was what the Quaid-e-Azam had created Pakistan for. It is a dramatic point, to say the least, as it looks with anger and also with the confidence to wonder and question. I was quite prepared for the anger, aware as I am that the state of affairs, both political and economic, keeps a large number of Pakistan's citizens chronically upset. It's a rare issue of the three Pakistani magazines I have kept up with over the last five years—*The Friday Times*, *The Herald* and *Newsline*—in which the majority of letters sent to the editor are not brimming with anger over one thing or another. The same is true of the articles, but the teenage girl's remark had availed an unusual context to express anger. The idea of using civic sanitation as a basis for judging Jinnah's achievement struck me as something entirely unexpected.

Jinnah undoubtedly had a vision of what he wanted when he proposed and popularized the idea of a separate state for Muslims. During the final phase of the independence struggle, Jinnah's vision moved towards becoming a strategy for political negotiation, but clarity eluded it all the way to the end, even in a geographical sense. His Independence Day speech suggests that he had envisioned the new nation carved out of India as a secular country. In retrospect, the speech comes across as a statement of confusion—even delusion—but at the time it was given it must have sounded just as uplifting and sublime to Jinnah's followers as Nehru's

midnight speech had sounded to his listeners in India and elsewhere.

Jinnah's idea of Pakistan evolved after his return from Britain in 1934. In this final phase of his political career, Jinnah's perceptions and strategies were, to a considerable extent, shaped by the poet Mohammed Iqbal, though the latter died in 1938. Both men had developed serious doubts about the future of Muslims in independent India. Their personalities and strengths differed, but Iqbal made more than a motivating impact on Jinnah during the mid-1930s. Having offered the vision of a geographically bounded state where Islamic polity would be free to evolve, Iqbal persisted in reshaping Jinnah's political inclination and ultimately succeeded. Iqbal's doubts about the sustainability of an integral Indian nation had philosophical as well as political origins, but Jinnah's doubts were also grounded in his personal political experience. He lived and struggled, it seems, out of personal anger, and succeeded in taking full advantage of the prevailing circumstances in turning his anger into a national dream. Did that dream include sanitation? Maybe, but the question would distract anyone into thinking of the other visionary of the independence struggle: Gandhi. About him one knows for sure that he perceived public sanitation as a goal and a reliable sign of India's propulsion into *swaraj*, while freedom from colonial rule was only a step forward.

In Gandhi's life story, whether written by him or others, one comes across sanitary and hygiene-related themes more than in any other life story one can locate in the market of modern books written over a century, perhaps ever written. One can correctly say, though to say this could be mistaken

for a sign of disrespect, that Gandhi was obsessed with cleanliness. And we know why. In his earlier life, hygiene and sanitation were matters of personal effort, but his later obsession with public hygiene was surely related to his moral rejection of the caste system. Sanitation figures as high on the priority list of Gandhi's utopia as justice and equality, because he perceived untouchability and scavenging as the ultimate injustice. And this linkage was something Gandhi discovered quite gradually, for it does not figure even peripherally in his book *Hind Swaraj*, which was written in 1909.² Gandhi's concern for cleanliness and hygiene was part of his commitment to self-reliance and community living, as we can gather from the accounts of the Phoenix and Tolstoy farms he set up in South Africa. However, public hygiene became a political programme for him in the 1930s, after he had pressurized Ambedkar to withdraw his demand for a separate electorate for the 'untouchable' castes, and to settle for a reserved quota in the general category. Constructive work and reform in the Hindu social order were high on Gandhi's priority list, but the Poona Pact of 1932 between him and Ambedkar appears to have made a decisive impact on his view that public sanitation held the key to weakening caste oppression, and social transformation.

Can we think of an Indian teenager who might remark when she sees litter on a street: 'Did Gandhiji make India free for this?' Several reasons come to mind to explain what makes it highly unlikely that an Indian youngster would make such a remark. For one thing, though Gandhi is regarded, idolized, and frequently cited as the Father of the Nation, far less is done during the school years in India to familiarize

children with Gandhi's life and vision than is done for Jinnah in Pakistan. Indeed, Gandhi's status as the Father of the Nation has remained largely metaphorical—a matter of saying only—in the absence of any assiduous public educational effort to establish discontinuity between the independent India fathered by Gandhi and its older historical versions. On the contrary, public education has remained committed to a belief in the continuity of India since ancient times. Gandhi's fatherhood of the nation has its substantial justification in the idea of freedom, but even in this limited context there are competing thoughts. India's right to freedom had had the status of a natural right, articulated first by Tilak, long before Independence. Leaders of the national movement did outline the ideals that India would pursue after it became free, but there was no consensus about these ideals. For some leaders, freedom promised to furnish an opportunity to recover the ideals which, according to them, India had attained in ancient times and later frittered away. Others thought that freedom would enable India to absorb the ideals of modernity associated with the European Renaissance. A third line presented Independence as a condition necessary to pursue a new set of goals, different from India's own traditional ideals, but also different from the ideals associated with the West's progress. This third perspective is best represented by Gandhi, whose ideals evoked a mixed response and continue to look somewhat arcane, though his stature as the leader of India's freedom movement remained undisputed after Independence. Indeed, if one tries to assess India's progress on the basis of Gandhi's ideals, the attempt soon begins to look unfair, to Gandhi as well as to