Partitions IV — India-Pakistan

Nobody asked but …

History had totally intermixed the Muslims among the Hindu and the minority ethnicities of the sub-continent. So one has to wonder what the English thought they would accomplish by breaking out the Pakistans, then separating them with a huge wedge. When the commercial exploitation of India by England and its East India Company was ended in the 1940s, what would have been wrong with the interlopers just pulling up stakes and going home, leaving the sub-continent to sort itself. But I guess the Handbook of Empire inveighs against such simplistic actions.

Could the truly awful, and unnecessary, disposition of the region been avoided? In any event — was it as a spiteful parting shot? — the Empire split the hapless area into two sovereign entities, and a third separate but dependent entity, East Pakistan. This was ostensibly to avoid a religious war between the Hindu and the Muslim. The result was warring nations rather than warring factions. Another result was misery for the Hindu inhabitants of the Pakistans and misery for the Muslim inhabitants of India. And this nationalistic kludge eventuated in a nuclear standoff between India and Pakistan. If the religious factions had not been handcuffed to states, how would the nuclear armaments ever have developed?

It seems as though this bulldogged insistence on dispensation and disposition, exhibited by the British in their colonial misadventures around the world, has been handed down to us, the Americans, to find expression in our horrid justice system, wherein erring on the side of complication rather than simplicity seems to fit our senses of logic and order.

— Kilgore Forelle