The Journal of Asian Studies Vol. 73, No. 2 (May) 2014: 299–300.
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Editor's Preface: Commentaries on the Partition

JEFFREY WASSERSTROM

The February 2014 issue of the *Journal of Asian Studies* opened with a section made up of two brief "Reflections" on partition—the traumatic South Asian developments of the late 1940s that accompanied the end of British rule over the subcontinent and led to the founding of India and Pakistan as separate nation-states. The first of this pair of short pieces was an introductory look at partition by Gerald James Larson, which I asked this prominent scholar of religion to write. I suggested that it take the form of an at-most lightly footnoted overview of the topic, which would provide basic information of a sort that would help nonspecialists understand the historical background of the partition and would serve to frame the main commentary to follow. That second piece, a meditation on memory and loss by historian Manan Ahmed Asif, was experimental in form for an academic article (a hallmark of the *Journal*'s one-year-old "Reflections" genre) and accompanied by photographs. The trio of essays that follow here, titled "Further Reflections on Partition," are part of a two-stage effort to respond to and carry forward discussion of issues raised in the earlier pieces. This sort of sequel to previously published work is unusual for the *JAS*, and is not something I expect to run with any regularity as editor, so some further remarks are in order.

When the February issue appeared, its "Reflections" section immediately generated a great deal of impassioned discussion among members of the Association for Asian Studies, the organization for which the *JAS* is the flagship publication. Much of this focused on the way that Larson's solicited contribution treated the history of the Hindu and Muslim divide and the nature of and borders between these two religious traditions. A good deal of important scholarship, critics of the essay suggested, has treated the two spiritual traditions as far more internally varied and the boundaries between them as more porous than his introduction implied. This made his essay read, they asserted, not like the kind of summing up of the current standard view of a topic that one might expect from a framing essay, but rather like the staking out of what is now, in some ways, a controversial stance. The energetic nature of the response to the feature brought to our attention just how charged debates on partition remain, and also raised our awareness of how significant and interesting the work is that has been done of late on the subject. This led us to decide to revisit partition, in different ways, in both this issue of the *JAS* and the final one of the year.

We begin this revisiting with the three essays below, which vary widely in emphasis, approach, and the degree to which they engage with the commentaries from the previous issue. Readers will find powerful essays by, respectively, a specialist in religious studies

Jeffrey Wasserstrom (jwassers@uci.edu) is Professor of History at University of California, Irvine.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911814000461 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concerned largely with spiritual issues and daily life (Peter Gottschalk), a specialist in the cultural and social history of premodern India (Richard Eaton), and a specialist in the history of partition itself (Joya Chatterji). In keeping with the "Reflections" format, each essay comes with a relatively limited scholarly apparatus; each author cites works germane to specific points, but does not attempt a comprehensive overview of new literature on the topic. In order to do justice to the richness of recent scholarship in the field, therefore, we have also commissioned a "Trends" essay on partition for inclusion in the November issue. This will be written by historian David Gilmartin and will serve as a sequel of sorts to both this issue's "Further Reflections on Partition" and a much-cited review essay on the topic that the same author published in the *JAS* sixteen years ago.

Note: Proofs of the three essays below were shown to Professor Larson ahead of publication as a courtesy, due to the way that two of them engage directly with his work. He sent the Editor the following comment in reply: "I have read the three pieces with interest and choose not to respond further. I only ask the readers of the journal to re-read my original opinion piece and draw their own conclusions about how to interpret the terrible tragedy of partition."

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