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Power, Religion, and Culture: Revisiting Pakistani Marxist Historiography of Muslim Rule in India

Dr. Muhammad Naveed Akhtar
Assistant Professor, Department of History and Political Science, Ghazi University, Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab, Pakistan
Email: mnakhtar@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0869-8728

Abstract
This study reevaluates the perspectives on Muslim rule/governance in India (711-1857 CE) advanced by three Pakistani Marxist and progressive historians—Sibte Hassan, Kazi Javed, and Mubarak Ali. These authors arose, in part, against Muslim nationalist history, which was organised around political narratives of dynasties, rulers, religious identity and the formation of Pakistan. Their search for understanding power centred on class relations, social structures, cultural production, practices of exclusion, and the experiences of historically oppressed social segments. However, their readings of medieval India are still debated. Hassan emphasises the need for local adaptation and the creation of a collective civilisation. Javed deals with the conflicts between religious tolerance and traditionalism. Ali discusses themes of conquest, political advantage, religious conversions, cultural estrangement and compulsion. This study investigates the effect of political power on religious interactions and cultural exchanges by comparing narratives of Arab Sindh, Ismaili Multan, the Delhi Sultanate, and Mughal India. It argues that neither imperial domination nor cultural syncretism alone can satisfactorily describe these changing relationships. Governors may prey upon communities while embracing indigenous customs; ecclesiastical organisations may nurture harmony while perpetuating stratification. The paper concludes with a critique of the epistemological bases, methodologies and argumentative weaknesses of Pakistani Marxist historiography. The main argument is that a credible history from below has to be more attentive to the provenance of evidence, spatial and social differences, material labour and the agency of people who are usually visible only through elite records. This approach is a more considered treatment of cultural exchange and power imbalances as interrelated historical phenomena rather than as competing moral appraisals.
Keywords: *Islamic governance, authority, faith, civilisation, Mediaeval India, historical materialism, cultural interaction, grassroots history, Pakistan, Marxist historiography*

1. Introduction: Authority, Belief, Community, and the Making of Historical Knowledge

Writing the history of Muslim rule in India has always been a matter of contests of power, identity and historical memory. The narratives around the colonial and orientalist often portrayed the Muslim rulers as the outsiders who brought alien institutions to the distinct civilisation of India (Asif, 2016; Talbot, 1995). The Pakistani Muslim nationalist historiography suggested an alternative narrative in which Muslim political authority, administrative advancements and cultural uniqueness paved the path for a distinct national future (Ikram, 1997, pp. i-xxvi; Qasmi, 2019, pp. 1066-1069). Narratives in precolonial India typically focused on dynasties, conquerors, religious reformers and achievements in courts, while narratives in colonial India focused on political leadership, constitutional conflicts and the notion of Muslim nationhood (Jaffar, 1950, pp. 1-2, 34-36, 53-54; Qureshi, 1971, pp. 20-21, 223; Qureshi, 2003, pp. 79-80). This custom was never perfectly consistent and one cannot simply ignore the political history. Its weakness was that it permitted rulers and communal religious identities to represent society as a whole.

The development of Pakistani Marxist and progressive historiography was mainly in reaction to this politically oriented mainstream (Ali, 1992; Hassan, 1986). It challenged the notion that the worthy subjects of study were confined to the political elites and nationalist leaders. Land tenure, workforce, assets, social hierarchy, structure of society and distribution of cultural resources were identified areas of study. Thus, communities without public power or representation were marginalised. In essence, history from below is about retrieving the stories of peasants, artisans, labourers, women, marginalised castes and social groups, and communities whose experiences are rarely recorded in official histories (Guha, 1982, pp. 1-2). Instead of simply presenting marginalised historical figures as objects of pity, the evaluation of national historical memory should be based on its challenge to dominant narratives and its capacity to empower them on rational grounds (Qasmi, 2019).

There are parallels with the critique of colonial and nationalist elitism by South Asian subaltern historians. Yet, the Pakistani authors discussed in this article should not be simply placed inside the Subaltern Studies group. Guha (1982, pp. 1-2) argues that historical narratives privileging the actions of elites do not sufficiently acknowledge forms of agency that arise beyond elite influence. This insight leads to a stringent question: is a historian merely empathising with the marginalised, or is he reconstructing the circumstances and actions that allowed these individuals to make history?

The investigation focuses on three scholars. Sibte Hassan (b. 1916-d. 1986) was a socialist writer and journalist who belonged to the progressive literary movement as well as the Communist Party of Pakistan. He argued that the Indian and Muslim traditions were formed through a constant interaction

between Muslim and Hindu communities (Hassan, 1975, 1986). Mubarak Ali (b. 1941) is a scholar of societal dynamics, authority and collective memory, and has often critically examined sanctioned narratives in textbooks (Ali, 1992, 2012c). Kazi Javed (b. 1956–d. 2020), a philosopher and historian of intellectual movements, worked on Muslim intellectual legacies, Punjabi Sufism and interactions between religious cultures (Javed, 1977, 1983). All three rejected a simplistic nationalist narrative that advocates Muslim exclusivism in South Asia. Nonetheless, they differed on what Muslim rule meant for the people of India: collaboration, cultural blending, coercion, or the strengthening of elite privileges.

The study compares the views of these historians on the same broad historical contexts: Arab Sindh, Ismaili Multan, Delhi Sultanate and Mughal India. Power is more than just sovereignty and military might. It also includes control of money, jobs, patronage and people. Religion is both the government-sanctioned kinds of community and the cross-border experiential institutions. Culture includes both material and immaterial customs: clothing, decorations, food, songs, language, knowledge, buildings and rituals. This is mainly a study of historiography, not an attempt to bring new medieval evidence to light. Thus, the writers' claims are treated as interpretive claims rather than established historical facts, especially when the support for them is equivocal. This differentiation is crucial in that it moves the focus of the investigation from the mere taking of facts as stated to a critical engagement with how historians have interpreted and represented them. Thus, the historian's claims and analysis are subjected to rigorous scrutiny rather than being an unchallenged affirmation of the historical events it purports to explain. Broadly, the discourse of the study is divided into three parts: the first discusses the dispositions of Sibte Hassan and Kazi Javed, who mainly advocate for cultural exchange and harmony between Hindus and Muslim of medieval India; the second discusses Mubarak Ali, who becomes critical of Muslim rule in India by implying a notion of cultural imperialism; and the third engages in the critical assessment of their narratives.

Research Questions

Below are the next three questions that guide the discourse of this study.

1. How did the Pakistani Marxist historians counter the Muslim nationalist interpretations of Indian history? How far did they replace elite political narratives with grassroots histories?
2. How did Sibte Hassan, Kazi Javed and Mubarak Ali see the relationship between governmental power, religious institutions and cultural exchange during the period of Muslim rule in India?
3. What are the epistemological, methodological and argumentative problems typical for such readings and what would a more evidence-based materialist history require?

2. The Muslim Nationalist Historical Narrative and the Challenge of Pakistani Marxism

Marxist historiography in Pakistan began as a critique of Muslim nationalist historiography, which they treat as myths. It challenged Muslim nationalists' versions of history by highlighting the underlying struggle for power, for the right to rule, to control, to create religious legitimacy and to shape cultural life. In response to a durable colonial image of Muslim conquest as an encroachment on an otherwise distinct civilisation, Muslim nationalists claimed India as their homeland, employed local expertise, permitted the continuation of religious customs, and promoted novel cultural expressions (Asif, 2016; Talbot, 1995). These claims are found in the historical writings of Jaffar, Qureshi, Ikram and the discourse of Jalaluddin on Turko-Persian settlement (Ikram, 1997; Jaffar, 1950, pp. 34-36, 62-68; Jalaluddin, 1993, p.1; Qureshi, 2003). But they often reflect society from a standpoint of political power. The central question of Marxist historiography is whether cultural similarities indicate equal participation or whether power inequalities persisted beneath the surface of appropriation.

Hassan and Javed challenge the fixed civilisational boundary suggested by the nationalist narrative. The main argument is that the fact of long-term coexistence made learning, borrowing and adaptation unavoidable. But even they do not have uniform justifications. Hassan sometimes depicts Muslim rulers as responsive to Indian culture, unlike the colonial British (Hassan, 1975; 1986). Javed makes a distinction between certain ruling elites, intellectuals and Sufi traditions. He argues that tolerance and orthodoxy are two opposing forces working within the same political and religious system. His notion of synthetic culture is largely the result of intellectual and mystical interaction as dialect, rather than uninterrupted history of communal concord (Javed, 1977, pp. 157-163; Javed, 1983, pp. 223-230).

Instead, Ali discusses people who took land, led armies, sat in seats of power, collected taxes and asserted religious authority (Ali, 1992; Ali, 2012b). He ties cultural hierarchy to aspirations of immigrant elites, but points out that architectural opulence is not incompatible with oppression. If all these things — the hiring of immigrants, the use of Persian script, the changing of ritual traditions — are treated as signs of one, continuing foreign dominance, then cultural imperialism is an increasingly inadequate model. The political significance of these behaviours should be illustrated in their respective contexts.

Therefore, cultural interchange does not lead to social parity (Flood, 2009). Judicial bodies might hire Indian artists while taxing low-level farmers; sovereigns could incorporate Hindu officials while maintaining symbolic or legal separations. Instead, military domination did not prevent further colonisation, mutual reliance or theological discourse (Talbot, 1995). The

history of medieval India cannot be narrated without mapping the changing relations of coercion and influence, the political significance of religious divisions, and the social conditions under which cultural activities thrived. Cultural imperialism and syncretism should not be proclaimed as conclusions before the facts have been assessed. In his analysis of coins, garments, monuments and reused materials, Flood argues for a history of cultural contact to study the artefacts that enabled power relationships and not just the expressions of tolerance (Flood, 2009).

3. Arab Sindh: Subjugation, Structures and Understanding of Authority and Adaptation

In his works like *Pakistan mein Tehzib ka Irtiqa* and *The Battle of Ideas in Pakistan*, Hassan describes a long-term evolution of culture, with Muslims living in India adopting visible elements of local life. He observes the similarity in dress, ornaments, physical features and royal etiquette. He also emphasises the participation of non-Muslims in civil and military administration (Hassan, 1975, pp. 166, 201). His claim is that a tiny ruling elite cannot effectively rule or create permanence without the cooperation of the larger population. The collaboration covered the management of accounts, trade and revenue, high positions and court services (Hassan, 1986, p. 138). The claim certainly challenges a historical narrative of social isolation between Muslim and Hindu communities.

Hassan calls Debal, Mansura, Multan and Uch in Sindh centers of education and exploration and not merely victims of Arab domination. His account also shows the intellectual exchanges between Sindh and Iraq and other centers of the Caliphate. He speaks of the engagement with philosophy, mathematics, medicine, language, religion and esoteric studies and accords immense value to the Indian knowledge that Arabic-speaking scholars and officials undertook (Hassan, 1975, pp. 169, 175–179). These are significant cases because they reverse the typical direction of influence: knowledge did not merely emanate from a Muslim center to an Indian periphery. For its part, Arab Sind must be approached with a view to distinguishing tales of conquest from signs of local religious establishments and social continuity (MacLean, 1989).

Hassan's narrative includes descriptions of communal clothing practices and testimonies of esteemed intellectuals recognised by travellers in the Sindh region. He tells the story of the educated Sindhis, who when enslaved and brought to Iraq were known for their skills in Arabic (Hassan, 1975, pp. 166-167). That story reveals a paradox that is built into any simple commemoration of trade. Forced displacement could lead to an increased flow of people and information; cultural progress and human oppression were not necessarily antithetical. A materialist interpretation would have to ask who controlled the actions of the enslaved and who profited from the knowledge subsequently generated by them.

In his narrative, Hassan records a petition of a local ruler, Mehrok bin Raik, who requested the translation of Islamic doctrine into the Sindhi language. He identifies the translation with a scholar who was well versed in Arabic and Sindhi and who hailed from Mansura and who is said to have lived at the court that had made the request (Hassan, 1975, pp. 167-168). Whether the episode can be reconstructed apart from existing sources is unclear, but its historiographical intent is clear: language was a means of negotiation, not merely a tool for imposing religious identification. An example of how minor elements of daily practice can be indicative of sustained interaction is his study of the Sindhi musical lexicon, whose titles are derived from Arabic (Hassan, 1975, pp. 171-172). But these etymologies have to be tested against the history of languages, and not merely accepted because there is a phonetic likeness.

Hassan's description offers an overview of the translation of Sanskrit medical texts into Arabic and the arrival of Indian specialists in Abbasid medical institutions, and exemplifies the deep intellectual connections that existed during the rule of al-Mansur and Harun al-Rashid (Hassan, 1975, pp. 175-176). He rejects the notion that Arab influence vanished without lasting effects. He asserts that communities living in coexistence invariably altered each other (Hassan, 1975, pp. 164-165, 178). The methodological strength of this argument is the earnest consideration of the cultural exchange. It is open to certainty replacing evidence. The presence of two populations in the same space does not allow us to understand the mechanisms of practice dissemination, the extent of their sharing, or the groups able to oppose.

Javed draws a clearer line between the savagery of acquisition and the steps of governance thereafter. In *Hindi Muslim Tehzib,* He sees the imperial nature of the Arab invasion, recognition of the non-Muslim inhabitants as protected subjects, retention of the native systems of administration, appointment of Hindu officials and the allowance of religious practices (Javed, 1983, pp. 35-36). He also emphasises the role assigned to Brahmans in supporting the new regime. These narratives dispute a story of rapid cultural destruction, but they must not be too readily read as evidence of social equality. Maintenance of existing hierarchies may promote conquest because of the motivations for collaboration of preexisting influential factions (MacLean, 1989). Asif's re-examination of the *Chachnama* warns us against considering a thirteenth-century political account as a direct account of eighth-century events (Asif, 2016).

Javed echoes the claim that the local residents regretted the departure of Muhammad ibn Qasim and held his legacy in high regard (Javed, 1983, p. 35). One has to look closely at the source of this narrative, which is more about the perceived legitimacy of the ruler than about Sindh's population as a whole (Asif, 2016). While Javed uses the term to signify accommodation, Ali's understanding of the same conquest emphasises

strategic growth and domination. The question is not whether there was a conquest, but what kind of evidence should establish its historical importance.

4. Ismaili Multan and the Delhi Sultanate: Religious and Cultural Mediation

The Ismaili community in Multan is an important one in Hassan and Javed's narratives. Hassan demonstrates that Ismaili religious practices had been more flexible than those of previous Arab elites and most amenable to local traditions (Hassan, 1975, pp. 188-189). He is fascinated by the potential of missionary language, social connections, and common religious symbols to bridge the gap between groups. In Javed's account, Sadr-ud Din, who was an Ismaili missionary in Multan, was associated with a Hindu ascetic, Machar Nath, and is seen as a representative of the fusion of Islamic and Indian traditions (Javed, 1977, p. 70). These examples suggest the cultural mixing outside the imperial court, but neither author recovers the economic resources or organisational structures that sustained the relevant communities (MacLean, 1989). MacLean's treatment of Ismailism in Arab Sind offers a useful institutional context that is difficult to deduce from the narratives of religious syncretism alone (MacLean, 1989).

The Delhi Sultanate witnessed a growth of linguistic and institutional diversity. Hassan points to the presence of several ethnic and cultural traditions in Muslim culture and the position gained by Persian in the affairs of administration (Hassan, 1975, pp. 180-186). He notes the exercise of power by Persian-speaking officials and intellectuals in all the Muslim political centers. He notes the Lodis' use of Hindi alongside Persian as a pragmatic adjustment to living and ruling in India (Hassan, 1975, p. 307). These observations provide a counter to a uniform image of Islamic culture: a common political-religious vocabulary with considerable linguistic and geographic diversity. There are two ways to understand the bureaucratic supremacy of Persian. It made translation and interaction across regions possible, but it also provided a mechanism for regulating courtly knowledge and appointments (Alam, 2004; Kumar, 2007).

Javed explains that the Sultanate was a fight among the Muslims themselves between the more progressive elements and the ones who wanted to keep the strict religious segregation. Balban, Kaiqubad and Alauddin Khalji are examples of sovereigns who sometimes separated political strategy from religious mandates (Javed, 2010, pp. 16-18). He explores narratives on Alauddin's desire to create a new religious order within the framework of a heterogeneous society whose customs were already mixing. The statement is interpretive, not literal; Javed suggests that political power might feel the need for shared frameworks that might overcome traditional sectarian boundaries. He places subsequent movements like the Bhakti traditions, Sikhism and Akbar's Din-i Ilahi in a

broader historical setting of responses to pluralistic societies (Javed, 2010, p. 18).

For Javed, devotional networks are central to interfaith interactions, with figures such as Nizamuddin Auliya, Nasiruddin Chiragh-i Delhi, and Amir Khusrau among the Chishti. At the same time, he considers Muhammad bin Tughluq, Firuz Shah Tughluq, some groups of Lodi aristocracy and some groups of Suhrawardi more prohibitive in terms of cultural amalgamation (Javed, 1977, pp. 39-55, 79-80; Javed, 2010, pp. 16-23). What we end up with is an ethical and intellectual structure that cannot be simplified to a Muslim-Hindu dichotomy. Taken out of context of specific rulings, local controversies, patrons, and congregations, the words "liberal" and "orthodox" are too vague. Just as a dynasty might have different customs in different contexts, so could a specific Sufi order (Alam, 2004).

5. The Mughal Period: The Cultural Dynamics, The Power of the Sovereign and Religious Pluralism

Hassan's argument for cultural integration is central to the Mughal period. Hassan argues that Babur's negative first impressions of India, recorded in his memoir *Tuzk-I Babari,* should not be read as a continued disposition of scorn toward a difficult conquest. (Hassan, 1975, pp. 275-278; Hassan, 1986, p. 143). He also quotes a letter, supposedly written by Babur to Humayun, which he describes as advice on how to rule justly, fairly and secularly. Similarly, Javed uses the similar quoted testimony to highlight a principle of religious tolerance (Javed, 2010, p. 30). The existence and validity of the document have been disputed, and this article argues that the testament is an expression of the historians' interpretive decisions rather than a confirmed statement of Babur's policy (Beveridge, 1923, pp. 78-82).

Hassan's extensive description of Mughal court life includes alliances with Indian royal families, participation in festivals such as Basant, Dussehra, Holi, and Rakhi, and the adoption of Indian dress, jewellery, food, music and dance (Hassan, 1975, p. 290). He also notes the role of Indian consultants, bureaucrats, and artists in imperial service (Hassan, 1986, pp. 143-144; Kinra, 2015). In *The Battle of Ideas in Pakistan*, he links the creative evolution under the Mughal and Bahmani eras to the interaction between Indian, Persian and Turkic cultures. For example, architecture, painting, music, literature, handicrafts and commerce all form part of his argument for a composite civilisation, as opposed to a culture preserved unaltered from an external origin (Asher, 1992; Truschke, 2016). The intellectual undertakings that enabled these interactions are exemplified in the documentary records of Sanskrit scholarship in Mughal courts (Truschke 2016) and of the Hindu Persian-language secretary Chandar Bhan (Kinra 2015).

Here Akbar's doctrine of *sulh-i kul*, often interpreted as universal peace or peace with all, becomes an effort to politically articulate a diverse society (Moin, 2022). Hassan argues that cooperation with Hindu subjects

contributed to the longevity of imperial rule and opened up more possibilities for engagement (Hassan, 1975, p. 305, 316, 353-356; Hassan, 1986, p. 144). Javed contrasts Akbar's political inclusivity with the reconciling religious efforts associated with Kabir and Guru Nanak (Javed, 1977, pp. 90-96; Javed, 2010, pp. 36-38). For him, imperial pluralism meant acknowledging differences, not just suppressing them. The composition of the court reflects a more inclusive political approach (Alam, 2004; Truschke, 2016). Moin's work indicates that *sulh-i kul* should be understood as a political-theological response to the challenges of sovereign peace-making, and not just as a forerunner to modern secularism (Moin, 2022).

The argument becomes more telling when compared with British imperialism. Hassan's *Mosa sey Marx Tak* argues that although the Delhi sultans and their elites did exploit the populace, much of the wealth they plundered remained within the Indian political system, whereas British rule was intrinsically linked to external resource extraction (Hassan, 2012, pp. 384-386). He compares the readiness of Turkish, Mongol, and Mughal elites to adopt local customs with the colonial doctrines, which placed a higher value on European culture than on that of India. The theory draws an important distinction between conquest followed by settlement and colonial subjugation based on a metropolitan connection. But the geographical concentration of accumulated resources is only one dimension of the exploitation. Even if the revenue paid for a palace in the same nation, a cultivator with a large revenue obligation to fulfill may feel controlled (Habib, 1999).

The courtly patronage cannot alone develop tolerance over an empire (Mukhia, 2004). Imperial policy was not applied uniformly to village life or regional disputes. The terms 'secular', 'liberal' and 'progressive' are not value-free descriptors of early modern politics (Moin, 2022). Hassan and Javed convincingly debunk a perennial Hindu-Muslim schism but royal appeasement should not be mistaken for proof of a just society.

6. Mubarak Ali's Interpretation of the Ideas of Conquest, Class Privilege and Cultural Alienation

The strongest argument comes from Mubarak Ali, who stands in stark contrast to the reconciliatory interpretations put forward either by Marxist historians like Hassan and Javed, or by those who represent a school of Muslim nationalist historiography. He replaces the grandeur of dynasties with an examination of the social arrangements that were used to exert political power in his books such as *Historian's Dispute*, *Almiya-e Tarikh, Tarikh ki Talash,* and *Essays on the History of Sindh*, and other writings connected to their subject matter. Rulers, aristocrats and clergy of immigrant origin were able to form privileged groups and maintain a distance from the communities from which they controlled land, labour and resources (Ali, 1992, pp. 4-14, 36-38; Ali, 2005, pp. 7-10). According to Ali, conquest is not just the start of a harmonious national community, but a

struggle for land, revenue, prestige, and legitimacy (Ali, 2012a, pp. 14-17, 39-42; Ali, 2012c, pp. 41-45). His reiteration of the category of the foreign ruler is critiqued, but it is his reasoning that does the work of bringing conflict back to narratives predisposed to praise courtly culture.

His narrative begins with the Arab invasion of Sindh, which he views as part of a larger imperial project, rather than a reaction to the turmoil taking place in the region (Ali, 2012b, pp. 20-21). He argues that incorporation into the Arab political environment has led to the marginalisation of earlier Sindhi historical memory (Ali, 2012c, p. 13). He further distinguishes between the religious and political purposes of invasion and the commercial activities carried on by Muslims along the southern coast of India. This distinction is important as the processes of commercial interaction, military occupation, missionary activity and settlement were not interchangeable with one another and it is not possible to infer the nature of one from the other (Asif, 2016; MacLean, 1989). A close reading of the *Chachnama* illustrates the way in which subsequent traditions of reading a document can affect the meaning that is perceived to be attached to the conquest itself (Asif, 2016).

According to Ali, the later invasions by the Turkic people and their wars with the Rajput powers were disastrous for a large number of local people. He argues that religious language often accompanied contests for material advantage (Ali 2012a, p. 9; Ali 2012b, pp. 21, 23-24). Raiding, plundering, desecration of temples, enslavement and capture of wealth were all actions which were carried out, he points out. The Delhi sultans, he further states, could also argue that they were defending Islam, without really passing much political power to the Muslims already living in India. Religious identity was there but these formulations did not eliminate inequalities between rulers and subjects. A community can also be divided hierarchically, i.e., both parties, the rulers and the ruled, might belong to the same religious group (Eaton, 2000).

There is also a centralisation element in Ali's thesis. The expansion of their sultanates and empires saw local political systems displaced and authority reallocated to the court and those dependent on the court (Ali, 2012b, p. 27). Ali criticises the tendency of some elements of the ulema to push rulers to adopt exclusionary measures, while at the same time interpreting the jizya as evidence of the subjugated status of conquered non-Muslim people (Ali, 2012a, pp. 13-19, 93-106; Ali, 2012b, pp. 45, 47). He further states that the political imagination of the immigrant elites had been directed toward Cairo, Baghdad or other cities outside the country which they still considered their homelands (Ali, 2012b, p. 35). Such claims bring to light coercive capacities that a purely celebratory language of synthesis has obscured. However, it is important to distinguish between them. Symbolic allegiance, administrative appointment, taxation, forced conversion, and

military extraction were all separate processes occurring with varying frequency and importance over the span of history.

Ali's reconstruction is most powerful in asking questions about who held power and how communities experienced the uneven distribution of power. When the understanding of behaviour becomes that of the "foreign ruler" and nothing else, the level of security goes down. However, dynasties cannot be classified solely on the basis of their place of origin (Kinra, 2015; Talbot, 1995). Dynasties that settle in the area, intermarry, co-opt regional elites, and rule for multiple generations cannot be categorised. Also, the existence of persecution does not mean that all religious authorities or intellectuals thought the same. If cultural imperialism is a fixed property of an ethnic group, a history designed to show social domination could, without intending to, repeat the community generalisations it was trying to combat.

His treatment of the destruction of the temple shows the need for an evidence-sensitive account. To desecrate a holy place was a grave political and religious act and could not be ignored, for some monarchs were patrons of other religious establishments. Thus, the conduct cannot be brushed aside. But examples of devastation have to be put into perspective with specific military battles, political conflicts and types of symbolism attached to sovereignty. Richard Eaton's research is particularly useful in this respect as he examines the historical circumstances of temple desecration rather than concluding a universal policy from a few instances (Eaton, 2000, pp. 283-287). As Talbot (1995) writes, this approach does not eliminate violence nor does it claim that every event is proof of a single, overarching level of civilisational enmity. In a similar vein, Talbot insists on the need to historicise religious identities and political animosities through specific circumstances and not to assume that they operated in their contemporary form (Talbot, 1995).

7. Material Culture, Social Stratification and Most People Who Are Going Unheard

Together, these historians map a busy terrain of material and intellectual exchange. These encounters include Sindhi music and translation, Ismaili mediation, Persian administration, Sultanate devotional societies, Mughal festivals, dress, cuisine, paintings, structures and crafts (Alam, 2004; Flood, 2009). One reads more in these documents of coercion, taxation, slavery, plunder, religious exclusion, unfair distribution of offices. These two histories are simply not related in any way. Perhaps a network which carries poetry or textiles may also collect duties and make possible military movement. The same workshop that produced famous works of art could be based on very unfair relations of labour. Asher (1992) and Truschke (2016) argue that culture was not just an ornament appended to politics but that its production and circulation were themselves shaped by authority, resources and the day-to-day work that went into it.

A materialist investigation would ask us to consider who spun the cotton worn at court, who made the jewellery, who mixed the pigments, who built the temples and who transported the luxury items, as Flood (2009) points out. Who was the owner of the production resources, who paid the artisans and who collected rents, beyond identifying the religious institutions that received support? Habib's work on agrarian relations provides possibilities for exploring issues of this kind (Habib, 1999). Did it involve the redistribution of resources through cultural borrowing or merely a change in elite consumption? We describe how those excluded from these processes by virtue of caste, gender, occupation or low literacy experienced them. If such concerns are not investigated, material culture will remain a collection of breathtaking objects, rather than an explanation of the dynamics of social relationships. Statements about courtly prosperity may be compared with relations of extraction using the categories that Habib's analysis of land revenue, cultivators and production identifies (Habib, 1999).

Rulers are much more easily visible in the chronicles than cultivators, enslaved people, women, domestic workers or artisans (Guha, 1982). This is a challenge for historians who care about history from below. As a consequence, the reading of court records must be combined with the reading of inscriptions, material remains, vernacular writing, local literature and any other evidence available (Eaton, 1993). Altering the criteria by which rulers are evaluated does not automatically restore the voices of the subordinated. To have agency, one has to pay attention to what individuals have produced, negotiated, rejected, and made sense of in their own situations. Eaton's reconstruction of Bengal shows how administrative records, the changing agrarian frontier, and religious institutions can be brought together to examine conversion and social transformation without reducing everything to royal policy (Eaton, 1993). Eaton's book contains Eaton's reconstruction of Bengal.

8. Contradictory Narratives: The Rethinking of Power, Religion and Culture

Pakistani progressive historians' accounts of mediaeval India were contested on the basis that they were either a perpetual Muslim political triumph or a static conflict between religions. Ali emphasised coercion and unequal power, whereas Hassan emphasised cultural borrowing (Ali, 1992; Hassan, 1975; Javed, 1983). Javed traced accommodation and exclusion in religious and political life. Ali emphasised compulsion. They talk about the difficulty of separating power, religion and culture in their debate. The institutions of government employed religious language, religious figures competed for patronage, and cultural forms were circulated in relations that were often both collaborative and unequal.

Imperialism and exchange, then, cannot offer a definitive reading of centuries of history. Both occurred in a wide variety of different ways, in places and social groups. Historical explanation, instead, demands close

attention to institutions, to productive relations, to the transition from conquest to settlement, and to the agency of those who made it possible for cultural life to exist (Eaton, 1993; Habib, 1999). This standard highlights several shortcomings in the methodologies that are being addressed here.

9. A Criticism of the Pakistani Marxist Historiography

The readings of Pakistani Marxist historiography of Muslim rule in India reveal important epistemological, methodological and argumentative tensions. This is, however, in contradiction with the Pakistani Marxist historiography, which is against the political and elite-centred narratives of Muslim nationalist historians. The central question for historiography is whether its focus on cultural adaptation, religious struggle, and imperial dominance actually reconstructs the experiences of subordinated groups, or rather reproduces elite-centered history under a different ideological guise. These constraints need to be critically reviewed to establish the extent to which Pakistani Marxist historiography lives up to its commitment to historical materialism, history from below and the recovery of voices that have been marginalised.

9.1. An Epistemological Critique on the Foundations and Limits of Historical Knowledge.

One of the strong beliefs of Pakistani Marxist history is that societies cannot be understood only through the prism of their rulers. But their arguments are often based on judicial decisions, dynastic decisions and famous Sufis to characterise entire peoples (Guha, 1982; Mukhia, 2004). A socially engaged account might nevertheless use exceptional elites as its main sources of knowledge, which is an instance of epistemological inconsistency. But the accommodating Mughals of Hassan and the alienated invaders of Ali provide conflicting judgements, without telling us how power was lived or dispersed among ordinary populations. The Mughals of Hassan seem to have been more accommodative than those of Ali.

The second epistemological problem it has is that it has a tendency to pre-empt, in advance, the question through the use of theory. Hassan will sometimes cite cultural impact as evidence that a composite civilisation has arisen. Ali will sometimes cite conquest as evidence that there is a permanent division between rulers and subjects. Flood (2009) and Talbot (1995) found that uneven trading is possible and that dominance can be shifted by alliances, opposition and settlements. Historical materialism is useful only if ideas such as class, imperialism, syncretism, and alienation are tested against evidence and not used to predetermine the meaning of historical materialism.

Disputed testimony gives this risk a concrete shape. Stories of zeal for an Arab conqueror are not representative of all Sindhis; evocative musical titles do not alone prove linguistic borrowing; and an attributed testament of Babur cannot point to Mughal tolerance without some proof of provenance

(Asif, 2016; Beveridge, 1923). For each of the assertions, it is important to consider respectively genre, chronology, transmission and social location. The historian has to distinguish the factual information provided by the source from the inferences and generalisations which the author makes about society.

9.2. Evidence, Scale and the Elusive Subaltern: A Constructive Criticism on Research Methodology.

The second limitation is the methodological shortcomings. A lot of this corpus presents a persuasive synthetic interpretation, but these interpretations do not always present a way of contrasting different types of evidence. Many sources, such as mediaeval chronicles, devotional memories, imperial rules, translations and subsequent nationalist tellings, do not answer the same questions (Asif 2016; Kumar 2007). The story of a ruler's benevolence should not be taken as a survey of interreligious relations; the chronicle's account of violence should not be immediately transformed into a measure of violence across an entire dynasty. Both examples are relevant enough to merit consideration. Each kind of testimony requires an account of the author, the audience for whom the testimony is intended, rhetorical conventions, and silences.

It also scales inconsistently. When people make statements about "the Hindus", "the Muslims", "the ulema", or "the ruling classes", it is the general practice to hide differences based on caste, language, locality, gender, wealth and institutional interest. Talbot (1995) said that each and every formal religious group had many communities embedded. Power should be made apparent by moving between the household, the hamlet, the marketplace, the shrine, the garrison, the city and the imperial court. It should also compare different places, and differentiate the moment of conquest from the much longer histories of administration, colonisation, intermarriage and cultural practice. The above are not technical luxuries. They want to know if the historian is talking about specific relationships or is just repeating a civilisational stereotype in progressive language. Talbot's use of inscriptional and local data is an example of why identities should be explored as historical formations and not as eternal collective essences (Talbot, 1995).

The promise of history from below is only partly realized, with peasants and craftsmen mostly portrayed as the victims of foreign arrogance or the beneficiaries of royal tolerance. In these interpretations, elites are seen to act against ordinary people. What is missing is a reconstruction of tactics that workers, women, local specialists, religious communities and cultivators employed to construct institutions from the ground up. While their labour was responsible for the cultural accomplishments celebrated in court-centered stories, their daily sacrifices also limited the shapes that dominance might take (Eaton, 1993). Guha's criticism of elitist-centred

history is relevant precisely because pity for the subordinated people is not yet a strategy for re-creating their initiative (Guha, 1982, pp. 5-7).

9.3. A Critical Review of the Consequences of Moral Dualisms and the Limitations of Materialism

Finally, the central polarity of cultural imperialism versus cultural exchange weakens the argument when it becomes a verdict on centuries of history that can only be positive or negative. Cultural influences are often present in interactions where there is a power imbalance (Flood, 2009). The destruction of a temple may allow for the continuation of a bilingual bureaucracy; a shrine can contain a diverse group of worshippers and still maintain its own hierarchies; a king can commission art that is produced by labourers trained in the local area and still demand a large amount of revenue. The existence of one fact does not nullify the existence of another fact. In this context, the relevant object of explanation is the structure of the relationship.

Hassan's analogy with the British Raj may be too generous to its predecessors: that the income extracted was retained within India did not stop the exploitation of the agricultural sector (Habib, 1999). As Javed explains, the distinction between liberal and orthodox actors can superimpose modern ideals on actions which are partly driven by revenue and national security. Kinra (2015) and Talbot (1995) also argue that focusing on elites of foreign origin, as expressed by Ali, may cause identity to stagnate and settlement, collaboration and transformation over generations to be underestimated. Any author risks highlighting data that supports a particular moral judgement, rather than confronting events that have the potential to disturb it.

Moreover, their arguments touch upon a more fundamental question of Marxism itself. A materialist reading cannot reduce culture to a mirror of class interest (Alam, 2004; Habib, 1999). Rather, it should link ideas and cultural forms to property, labour, production, institutional reproduction, and political power. Moreover, it should not be automatically virtuous for those actors who are deemed to be progressive. If the organising categories are fanaticism and tolerance, or immigrant and indigenous, the result may be a story that is more ethically charged than an account of historical causality. A good history should be able to show how culturally acceptable policies served the aims of ruling interests, how oppressive institutions depended on local partners, and how subjugated communities took advantage of the opportunities available to them within the limits of the situation.

Pakistani Marxist historiography will be more convincing if it retains emancipatory ambitions, but abandons pre-defined judgements. It would set limited statements that could be tested and it would test controversial testimony against independent evidence. Besides marking the social position of its sources, it would compare areas and time periods and attend

to material production as closely as symbolic exchange. It would not only ask whether or not two cultural traditions happened, but it would also ask who organised that meeting, who laboured to make it possible, who benefited from it, and who was in the position to say no. Above all, it would cease to substitute the voice of the historian for the voices of the oppressed. The point of history from below is not to praise the people for rhetorical effect. This is done in the hope of exalting them to historical prominence as the authors of a world that conquerors and courts never quite mastered.

10. Conclusion

This re-examination produces the finding that there is neither a uniformly oppressive Muslim order of rule nor an unbroken tradition of cultural harmony. Sibte Hassan throws light on the processes of borrowing and settlement, while Kazi Javed focuses on religious mediation and intellectual plurality and Mubarak Ali calls for bringing back conquest, status and coercion into the context of historical explanation. Their differences are intellectually constructive because power, religion and culture were associated, rather than mutually exclusive.

But a history that purports to speak for the subordinated must do more than merely replace one form of ruler judgement with another. The investigation has to deal with production, revenue, labour, local institutions and the unequal evidence which can be used to reconstruct everyday lives. Fresh research on material artefacts, Persianate administration and agrarian progression, along with critical readings of narratives about conquests, show how this investigation can proceed. Pakistani Marxist historiography is still important as a challenge to nationalist exclusivism, but its promise will be most fully realised in source-critical, comparative histories that give historical agency, not just rhetorical sympathy, to those who are typically absent from political narratives.

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