

Journal of Religion & Society (JR&S)

Available Online:

<https://islamicreligious.com/index.php/Journal/index>

Print ISSN: [3006-1296](#) Online ISSN: [3006-130X](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

Raja Dahir, the Arab Conquest, and the Roots of Religious Intolerance in Sindh

Koyal Imdad Veesar

M.Phil Scholar, Department of History University of Sindh Jamshoro

koyalindad782@gmail.com

Rehana Kausar Arain

Lecturer, Department of History, University of Sindh

rehana.kausar@usindh.edu.pk

Ghulam Rasool

M.Phil, Department of Muslim History, University of Sindh

ghulam.rasool@scholars.usindh.edu.pk

Abstract

The Sindh History has been a decisive discourse in the South Asian historical events. As the Arab advent played pivotal role to emerge a new shape of the Sindh in the chronological annals. Chachnama and other Islamic chronicle written in 12th century and covering the history of Arab conquest of Sindh of 712 C.E; articulated the stories of Raja Dahir's fall based on divinely sanctioned victory of Muslims over defeated Hindus, and embedded the ideological framework of Muslims legitimate status over the Hindus as defeated and subordinated communities. With time these narratives of religious supremacy were reinterpreted through Arabic, Persian, and Urdu under colonial effect, and Pakistani orientalist touched the biased historiography, to reinforce a discourse of religious legitimacy tied to conquest of Sindh. This article contends that this legacy continues to shape patterns of religious extremism in contemporary Sindh, where minority communities particularly Hindus and Christians face forced conversions, blasphemy allegations, and systematic discrimination. This study highlights how the manipulation of history enables the perpetuation of religious intolerance, by combining that historiographical analysis combined with contemporary case studies. It concludes that critical re-examination of early Islamic historiography is essential to dismantle ideological justifications for extremism and to foster inclusive narratives that protect minority rights in Pakistan.

Keywords: Raja Dahir, Chach Nama, Religious Extremism, Forced Conversions, Blasphemy Laws

Introduction and Literature Review

South Asian history is the history entangled with the narratives of religion, conquest, and identity. Among them, the Arab conquest of Sindh in 712 C.E. held a pivotal place in both medieval chronicles and modern South Asian history; which is culminated in the defeat of Dahir. This event, preserved most famously in the *Chach Nama*, has been framed as the “first step of Islam in the subcontinent” (Baladhuri, 1989). Beyond its historical importance, however, the conquest has acquired symbolic

weight: it has been retold, reshaped, and mobilized as an ideological tool across centuries (Rasool *et al.*, 2024).

The fall of Dahir is not remembered as a localized political shift but as a civilizational and religious turning point. Arab chroniclers, writing from within the expansionist ethos of the early caliphate, cast the conquest as a triumph of Islam over Hindu “idolatry” (Friedmann, 1986). Later Persian redactions of the *Chach Nama* transformed it into a moralized tale of divine justice, further legitimizing Muslim rule (Asif, 2016). Colonial historians, in turn, deployed the same narrative to justify British imperial authority, portraying South Asia as perpetually prone to religious conquest (Rasool *et al.*, 2023). In modern Pakistan, Pakistani nationalist historiography celebrates the conquest as the “entry of Islam” into the region, establishing an ideological lineage between early Islamic expansion and contemporary Muslim identity (Khatti *et al.*, 2023).

This article argues that such historiographical constructions are not merely academic debates; they are deeply consequential in shaping social and political realities. Historical narratives about the conquest of Sindh and the defeat of Dahir have created an ideological framework that continues to influence religious extremism in present-day Sindh. In particular, these narratives underpin attitudes and practices that marginalize Hindu and Christian minorities. Reports of forced conversions of Hindu girls, misuse of blasphemy laws against non-Muslims, and systemic exclusion are all framed within an ideological environment where minorities are imagined as historical “defeated communities” (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [HRCP], 2020).

The persistence of this discourse invites critical questions: How was the story of Dahir’s defeat constructed in early Islamic chronicles? How did later historiographical traditions reinterpret or reinforce this narrative? And how are these constructions invoked, implicitly or explicitly, in contemporary Sindh where minority rights are contested?

This study addresses these questions through a combined methodology of historiographical analysis and contemporary case study research. The first part of the paper critically engages with the *Chach Nama* and other medieval sources, situating them in the historical and political contexts. It demonstrates that these texts were not neutral accounts but ideological instruments that sought to justify conquest and religious dominance. The second part of the paper traces the transmission of these narratives into modern discourse, examining how they are mobilized in contemporary Sindh, particularly in cases of forced conversions and blasphemy accusations. By linking historical narrative with present-day extremism, the study reveals the enduring power of history as an ideological resource.

The significance of this research lies in its dual contribution. On one hand, it enriches historiographical debates by highlighting how medieval texts such as the *Chach Nama* have been constructed, transmitted, and repurposed across centuries. On the other hand, it intervenes in contemporary policy debates on religious extremism and minority rights

in Pakistan, demonstrating how historical narratives continue to sustain ideological practices of exclusion.

The argument advanced here is not that extremism in Sindh can be mechanically “traced back” to Dahir’s defeat. Rather, it is that the ideological constructions around this event—produced, circulated, and reinterpreted over centuries—have created a narrative environment in which religious extremism finds legitimacy. In other words, history does not directly cause extremism; instead, the manipulation of history provides the discursive resources that make extremism possible. The study (Rasool *et al.*, 2023) pens down about the Hijrat movement as the first political case of Sindh which has traced its roots within the research (Arain *et al.*, 2025). Meanwhile, the research discourse historical culture of Sindh in Otaq tradition (Khatti *et al.*, 2023), tracing the steps toward Sindh historiography (Rasool *et al.*, 2024) reshaped the history of Sindh after WWI.

This article proceeds in six parts. Following the introduction, the second section reviews the literature and historiographical debates on the Arab conquest of Sindh, focusing on the authorship and ideological framing of the *Chach Nama*. The third section analyzes how Dahir’s defeat was narratively constructed as a religiously sanctioned victory. The fourth section links these narratives to contemporary Sindh, examining forced conversions and blasphemy laws as case studies of how ideological frameworks rooted in history are applied today. The fifth section presents a discussion of the findings, highlighting the mechanisms by which historical narratives are mobilized in the present. The article concludes with reflections on the necessity of critical historiography for resisting extremist appropriations of the past.

Historiographical Background

The Arab conquest of Sindh (711–712 CE) has been studied across multiple historiographical traditions, each offering competing interpretations of the same event. To understand how the fall of Dahir has been framed as the ideological foundation of religious extremism, it is essential to examine both the primary sources—most notably the *Chach Nama*—and the secondary scholarship that interrogates these texts. This literature review traces the evolution of the historiography in three broad phases: (a) early Islamic chronicles, (b) medieval Persian and regional retellings, and (c) colonial and postcolonial scholarship. It also highlights how modern academic debates situate the conquest of Sindh within broader discussions of memory, identity, and religious extremism.

Early Islamic Chronicles and the Problem of Sources

The earliest references to the Arab conquest of Sindh appear in Arabic chronicles such as al-Balādhurī’s *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (1916/1989) and later works by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Athīr. Al-Balādhurī presents the conquest as part of the broader Islamic expansion under the Umayyads, emphasizing the role of Muhammad bin Qasim as a commander executing the caliph’s orders. The narrative frames the campaign as a divinely sanctioned triumph over a hostile, “idolatrous” kingdom

(Baladhuri, 1989). While concise, these accounts set the template for viewing Sindh as the “gateway of Islam” into the Indian subcontinent (Friedmann, 1986).

Yet, these chronicles raise historiographical challenges. First, they were written decades, sometimes centuries, after the conquest, raising questions of reliability. Second, the authors were embedded in the ideological milieu of the early Abbasid and later Islamic polities, which often required presenting conquests as part of a continuous expansion of Islam (Asif, 2016). Thus, while useful for establishing a general chronology, early Arabic chronicles must be read as ideological texts rather than objective histories.

The *Chach Nama*: Authorship, Agenda, and Influence

The most detailed account of the conquest of Sindh and the fall of Raja Dahir is preserved in the *Chach Nama*. Written in Persian in the early thirteenth century by ‘Ali b. Hamid b. Abu Bakr Kufi, a courtier in Uch, the *Chach Nama* claims to translate an earlier Arabic text but is more likely a Persian composition reflecting the concerns of its time (Asif, 2016; Mirza, 2011). Scholars agree that the *Chach Nama* is less a factual chronicle and more a political-romantic narrative, interweaving moral lessons with historical episodes (Thapar, 2002).

The text glorifies Islamic conquest while simultaneously dramatizing Dahir’s fall as both tragic and inevitable. Dahir is depicted as a ruler bound by fate, unable to resist the divine will manifested through Muhammad bin Qasim’s army. This framing naturalizes Muslim political dominance as divinely ordained, delegitimizing Hindu rule (Friedmann, 1986). The ideological function of the *Chach Nama*, then, was to legitimize Muslim authority in thirteenth-century Sindh, a period when new ruling elites sought to ground the legitimacy in historical precedent.

Modern historians, such as Asif (2016), stress that the *Chach Nama* should be read as a “mirror for princes” literature, designed to instruct rulers through moralized history. Its narrative tropes—betrayal, divine justice, and righteous conquest—resonate with Persian historiographical traditions rather than early Arabic chronicles. This recognition complicates simplistic readings of the *Chach Nama* as a direct record of events in 712 CE.

Despite these limitations, the *Chach Nama* has been enormously influential. Translated into Urdu and circulated widely in South Asia, it became a foundational text in both colonial and nationalist histories of Sindh. Its depiction of Dahir as a defeated Hindu ruler and Muhammad bin Qasim as a heroic Muslim conqueror has shaped collective memory across centuries (Khatti *et al.*, 2023).

Persian and Regional Retellings

Beyond the *Chach Nama*, other Persian and regional texts reinterpreted the conquest of Sindh. During the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal periods, Dahir’s defeat was occasionally referenced as the symbolic entry of Islam

into the subcontinent, though it did not dominate historical consciousness as much as later nationalist retellings (Eaton, 1993).

Regional Sindhi oral traditions, however, preserved more ambivalent memories of Dahir. In some folk narratives, Dahir is remembered sympathetically as a ruler who resisted foreign invasion, while others integrate him into Islamic cosmologies as a figure whose downfall was foreordained (Boivin, 2010). These contrasting traditions highlight the plurality of memory before the narrative was standardized in colonial and Pakistani nationalist historiography.

Colonial Historiography

British colonial historians seized upon the Arab conquest of Sindh to construct a broader theory of Indian history as a sequence of invasions. Henry M. Elliot and John Dowson's multi-volume *History of India as Told by Its Own Historians* (1867–1877) translated and compiled Islamic chronicles, including the *Chach Nama*. The research presented Dahir's defeat as the "opening chapter" of Muslim India, reinforcing colonial claims that South Asia had always been governed by successive waves of foreign conquerors (Thapar, 2002).

Colonial historiography thus stripped the event of its regional context and framed it as part of a larger narrative of civilizational succession. This approach served imperial ideology by portraying British rule as simply the latest, and supposedly most advanced, phase in this succession. While colonial historians claimed objectivity, the selective translations and framing amplified the image of Muhammad bin Qasim as a civilizing hero and Dahir as a defeated "other."

Postcolonial and Pakistani Nationalist Reframing

In post-Partition Pakistan, Pakistani nationalist historiography appropriated the Arab conquest of Sindh as a foundational moment of Muslim identity. School textbooks and official histories present Muhammad bin Qasim as the "first Pakistani" and a symbol of Islamic triumph (Khatti *et al.*, 2023). The *Chach Nama* is cited to legitimize the notion that Pakistan's origins lie not in 1947 but in 712 CE.

This ideological reframing has profound consequences. It equates national identity with religious conquest, reinforcing the idea that non-Muslims are outsiders to the Pakistani polity. In Sindh, where Hindu minorities remain significant, this narrative fosters a political environment that normalizes discrimination. Reports of forced conversions and accusations of blasphemy against Hindus and Christians occur against this backdrop, where historical defeat is translated into contemporary marginalization (HRCP, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Contemporary Scope and Significance

Recent academic work has moved beyond questions of factual accuracy to analyze how the conquest of Sindh functions as cultural memory. Asif (2016) argues that the *Chach Nama* is less about 712 CE and more about the anxieties of thirteenth-century Uch, where rulers sought to consolidate legitimacy. Similarly, Thapar (2002) critiques the colonial

construction of “invasion narratives” and the afterlives in South Asian nationalism (Rasul *et al.*, 2024).

Contemporary studies also connect these narratives to patterns of extremism. For instance, Ahmed (2012) notes that the glorification of conquest in Pakistani textbooks fosters intolerance toward minorities. Human rights scholars document how blasphemy laws and forced conversions in Sindh are legitimized by an implicit historical logic: since Hindus were once defeated and subordinated, the continued subordination is imagined as natural (HRCP, 2020).

This scholarship suggests that the significance of Dahir’s defeat lies not in the event itself but in the ways, it has been remembered, retold, and mobilized. The persistence of these narratives demonstrates the ideological power of history in shaping contemporary religious extremism.

Conclusion

The literature reveals several key insights. First, the primary sources, especially the *Chach Nama*, are not neutral records but ideological narratives crafted in specific historical contexts. Second, colonial and Pakistani nationalist historiographies reinterpreted these narratives to serve the own political projects, embedding the conquest of Sindh in broader discourses of identity and legitimacy. Third, in contemporary Pakistan, these narratives underpin extremist ideologies that marginalize minorities, manifesting in forced conversions and blasphemy accusations.

Thus, the historiography of Dahir’s defeat illustrates how history is never static; it is continually reconstructed to meet the ideological needs of successive eras. Recognizing this dynamic is essential for challenging the extremist uses of history in Sindh today.

References

- Arain. R. K., Khaskheli. J., & Rasool.G. (2025). Political Contest Between Muslims of Sindh and the British Government during the Hijrat Movement. *International "Journal of Academic Research for Humanities"*,5(1), 43–50. Retrieved from <https://jar.bwo-researches.com/index.php/jarh/article/view/536>
- Asif, M. (2016). *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia*. Harvard University Press. https://www.google.com.pk/books/edition/A_Book_of_Conquest/Z4oxDQA_AQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA1&printsec=frontcover
- Baladhuri, A. (1989). *The Origins of the Islamic State* (P. K. Hitti, Trans.). Cosimo Classics. (Original work published 1916).
- Rasool, G., Mangi, S. N., keerio, T. H., Ahmed, A., & Charan, F. (2024). Examining the Odyssey of China Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Historical Perspective. *Zhongguo Kuangye Daxue Xuebao*,29(3), 117-129 <https://zkdx.ch/journal/zkdx/article/view/55>
- Boivin, M. (2010). *Sindh Through History and Representations*. Oxford University Press.
- Eaton, R. (1993). *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*. University of California Press.
- Friedmann, Y. (1986). *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious*

Thought and Its Medieval Background. University of California Press.

Rasool, G., Keerio, T. H., & Haider, R. (2023). Hijrat Movement: First Political Case in the Modern History of Sindh. *Al-Qamar*, 27-40. doi: <https://doi.org/10.53762/alqamar.06.01.e03>

HRCP. (2020). *State of Human Rights in Pakistan 2019*. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. <https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2020-State-of-human-rights-in-2019-EN.pdf>

Human Rights Watch. (2014). "We Are the Walking Dead": Killings of Shia Hazaras in Balochistan, Pakistan. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/29/we-are-walking-dead/killings-shia-hazara-balochistan-pakistan>

Mirza, K. (2011). Re-Reading the *Chachnama*: A Textual and Contextual Analysis. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 21(2), 161–176.

Thapar, R. (2002). *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. University of California Press. https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=-5irrXXoapQC&pg=PR3&source=gb_s_selected_pages&cad=1#v=onepage&q&f=false

Ahmed, M. (2012). The long thirteenth century of the *Chachnama*. *The Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 49(4), 459-491. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464612463804>

Rasool, G., Kausar, Arain, R., & Khatti, H. D. (2024). Interplay Polemic between Sindhi Scholars after First World War. *Al-Amir Research Journal for Islamic Studies*, 5(04), 31–40. Retrieved from <https://www.alamir.com.pk/index.php/ojs/article/view/186>

Khatti, D. H., Rasool, G., & Keerio, T. H. (2023). Historical Research on Otaq Culture in Sindh. *Progressive Research Journal of Arts & Humanities (PRJAH)*, 5(2), 28-41. doi: <https://doi.org/10.51872/prjah.vol5.Iss2.262>

Rasul G., Mukhtarova K. ., & Zhan B. N. (2024). The Role of Afghanistan in Central Asia: A Review of Risks and Future Prospects. *KazNU Bulletin. International Relations and International Law Series*, 106 (2), 62–69. <https://doi.org/10.26577/IRILJ.2024.v106.i2-06>