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Public Arenas in an Islamic Republic: A Theoretical Framework for the Social History of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Historians of Pakistan have rarely paused over the concept that any social history of the country must presuppose: the public. This article asks whether Jürgen Habermas's celebrated model of the public sphere can describe the postcolonial Punjab, and answers that it cannot do so without reconstruction. Taken neat, the model excludes the illiterate, the vernacular, the ritual, and the religious, which is to say most of the Punjabi public between 1947 and 1977. Drawing on Habermas's critics, on Sandria Freitag's notion of public arenas, on C. A. Bayly's account of the Indian information order, on Dietrich Reetz's extension of the concept to South Asian religious movements, and on Karl Popper's open society, the article specifies five features that distinguish the postcolonial Punjabi arena: multilingualism, a continuum of orality and print, ritual as argument, an entangled state, and plural rival publics. Three demonstrations, the Lahore coffee house, the Sufi shrine, and the constitutional controversies of 1949 and 1953, show the framework at work and establish the feedback loop running between arena and state. The framework is portable, and it explains why the constitutions of an arguing society came to name Pakistan an Islamic Republic.

Keywords: Public Sphere; Public Arenas; Habermas; Punjab; Pakistan; Social History; Sufi Shrines; Print Culture

Introduction

Every social history rests on a concept of the public, and historians of Pakistan have mostly borrowed theirs without inspection. Consider two gatherings on any evening in the Punjab of the 1950s. In Lahore, at a café on the mall, poets and journalists argue over tea about socialism, the ulema, and the character of the new state; the scene would have been legible to any theorist of the European Enlightenment. Some miles away, at the annual festival of a Sufi shrine, thousands who will never write a letter to an editor listen to a custodian expound the sacred destiny of Pakistan; the scene fits no chapter of that theory at all. Both crowds are debating the same question, what Pakistan is for, and any framework that admits the first while ignoring the second has decided the answer before the research begins.

The wager of this article is that the concept of the public sphere can be rebuilt for the Punjab rather than abandoned to Europe. We proceed in four movements: an exposition of Jürgen Habermas's model that takes its restrictions seriously; a survey of the critics who pluralized it and of the South Asianists who adapted it; a positive specification of five features that distinguish the postcolonial Punjabi arena from the bourgeois sphere; and three demonstrations drawn from Lahore's coffee houses, the shrines of the countryside, and the constitutional storms of 1949 and 1953. The framework grows out of doctoral research on public debate in the Punjab between independence and the coup of 1977, and it is offered here in a form deliberately portable beyond that case.

The stakes of the exercise are practical, not ornamental. A theoretical framework is a decision about what counts as evidence, and the frameworks now in use decide badly. If the public means only literate persons conducting rational-critical debate in print, then the shrine falls out of the archive, the illiterate majority falls out of politics, and the influential thesis that Pakistan was insufficiently imagined wins by definition rather than by demonstration. If, on the other hand, the concept is stretched until every gathering of persons qualifies, the historian loses the ability to say why some arguments reached the constituent assemblies and others died in the bazaar. Between these failures lies the narrow ground this article attempts to map: a concept of the arena restrictive enough to explain, and capacious enough to see.

The Bourgeois Public Sphere

Habermas's model begins in the coffee houses of eighteenth-century England, the salons of France, and the reading clubs of the German lands. In his account, private persons drawn from a rising commercial and professional class came together in these spaces to discuss matters of shared concern, moving from literature to politics, and their discussions observed a distinctive discipline: what mattered was the better argument, not the rank of the speaker. Journals of the type of the *Tatler* carried the conversation beyond the rooms in which it began, and a sphere of public opinion took shape between the private household on one side and the apparatus of the state on the other.¹ It is a beautiful model, and its beauty has always been part of its danger, for it invites imitation rather than interrogation.

The historical claim that matters most for Pakistan is the model's ending, not its beginning. Habermas argued that over time the states of Western Europe were compelled to acknowledge the public sphere in the making of constitutions and of policy; opinion, organized and self-confident, became a power that rulers answered whether they wished to or not. This is the hinge on which any application to Pakistan must turn, because the puzzle of Pakistani history between 1947 and 1977 is precisely a puzzle of acknowledgement: three constitutions, each bearing the marks of arguments conducted far outside the chambers that drafted them. A theory that connects noisy rooms to constitutional text is worth the trouble of repair, and that is the justification for everything that follows.

¹Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

Habermas built his public deliberately narrow, and the narrowness was constitutive rather than accidental. Admission to the bourgeois sphere ran through property and education; its members were literate, propertied, male, and, in each national case, monolingual, debating in English, French, or German as the case might be. Women, workers, and the unlettered stood outside, and religion, in the model's secular architecture, belonged to the private sphere from which the public had emancipated itself. Habermas knew all this and said so; he also mourned the later decay of his sphere into a market of consumers managed by mass media. The restrictions matter here because each one of them, transferred to the Punjab, would expel most of the population from the story: a province largely illiterate, publicly multilingual, and saturated in religious observance fails every entrance requirement the model sets.

Historians soon noticed that the model was also, in part, a fantasy of itself. Harold Mah warned that historians had domesticated the public sphere into a place, a kind of hall that social groups enter and exit, when its real rhetorical work was to allow particular interests to speak in the voice of a fictive unified public.² The warning is worth carrying into the Pakistani case, where every contender, the religious parties, the progressives, the state itself, claimed to speak not for a faction but for the awam, the people as such. Mah's point cuts both ways: the claim to embody the public is always a performance, but the performance is itself a datum, and a history of the idea of Pakistan is in large measure a history of rival performances of the public.

Pluralizing the Public

Geoff Eley demonstrated that even the nineteenth-century West never possessed the single sphere of the model. Placing Habermas in his own century, Eley showed a crowded field of competing publics, artisan, radical, confessional, nationalist, each with its own presses, meeting rooms, and manners of argument, and each defining itself against the others as much as against the state.³ The lesson is not that Habermas was wrong about coffee houses but that the definite article was always a polemic: there was never the public sphere, only publics in the plural, unequal in resources and jostling for the authority to speak for the whole. For the historian of the Punjab this is liberation, because it converts what looked like Pakistani deviance, a public fractured among rightists, leftists, and Sufi devotionalists, into the normal condition of public life everywhere.

Mary Ryan supplied the gendered correction from the American record. Barred from the official public of electoral politics and the press, nineteenth-century women built their own routes of access, through benevolent associations, reform crusades, and the strategic use of the street, and Ryan's conclusion was that publicness is best studied as a continuing struggle

²Harold Mah, "Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians," *Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 1 (2000).

³Geoff Eley, "Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century," in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

over access rather than as a settled space with a fixed membership.⁴ Transferred to the Punjab, the point becomes a discipline for the researcher: the question is never simply who was present in an arena but who was kept out of it, by what mechanisms, and through what side doors the excluded nevertheless made themselves heard. We return to this discipline below, because the arenas of Lahore fail it in ways the framework must confess rather than conceal.

Dietrich Reetz carried the concept across the colonial line and stretched it in two directions at once. Studying the religious movements of colonial India, and Islamic activism from Central Asia to Pakistan, Reetz contested the model's confinement to a single language of debate and its narrow inventory of expressive forms, insisting that arts, dress, behavioral patterns, and the mass media all belong to public expression alongside the printed argument.⁵ His most useful coinage for our purposes is the publicness of the public sphere: the degree to which participation stands open to all comers, treated not as a definitional requirement but as a variable that rises and falls and can be measured. A framework built on Reetz's variable can ask of any Punjabi arena, the coffee house no less than the shrine, how open it actually was, and to whom, and when.

Arenas, Information, Ritual: The South Asian Inheritance

Sandria Freitag renamed the object of study, and the renaming was an argument. Working on the emergence of communalism in colonial North India, Freitag proposed the term public arenas for spaces in which community is constituted through collective public ritual, the procession, the festival, the commemorative gathering, performances that do the work of debate without taking the form of conversation.⁶ An arena, unlike a salon, does not check religion at the door, and it does not require literacy of those it admits; its languages include the chant, the banner, and the route of a march through contested streets. Freitag developed the concept to explain how Hindu and Muslim publics crystallized against each other; our use of it, for the internal Muslim argument over the meaning of an achieved Pakistan, extends the concept to a question its author did not pose.

Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge generalized the revision into a research programme. Announcing the study of public culture, they described the public life of societies like India as a set of fragmented, overlapping zones in which ideas, cultural traditions, and media compete, with no master sphere adjudicating among them.⁷ The formulation licenses the historian to hold together, within one analysis, sites that polite theory keeps apart: the film poster and the fatwa, the mushaira and the ministry handout. For the Punjab between 1947 and 1977 the license is indispensable, because contemporaries experienced these registers as one

⁴Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

⁵Dietrich Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere: Religious Groups in India, 1900–1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); Dietrich Reetz, "Islamic Activism in Central Asia and the Pakistan Factor," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 23, no. 1 (1999).

⁶Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁷Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, "Why Public Culture?" *Public Culture* 1, no. 1 (1988).

continuous argument, moving in a single evening from a newspaper editorial to a poem recited from memory to a preacher's peroration, and a framework that separates them falsifies the texture of the debate it studies.

C. A. Bayly showed that Indian publicness did not wait for print, let alone for Habermas. His reconstruction of the information order of North India between 1780 and 1870 recovered a society of newsletter writers, bazaar intelligence, running messengers, and itinerant learned men, through which news and opinion circulated with a speed and reach that startled the colonial state, keeping ordinary society, in his phrase, remarkably well informed.⁸ Bayly's deep chronology matters because it dissolves the assumption that public argument is a modern import that arrived with the printing press and could therefore be withdrawn with a censor's order. The society that entered Pakistan in 1947 had been debating its rulers, by its own means, for centuries; independence changed the subject of the argument, not the fact of it.

Karl Popper enters this genealogy by an unexpected door, and it was Reetz who opened it. Popper's account of the passage from closed, tribal society to the open society, in which inherited tradition is exposed to criticism and the state learns responsiveness, supplies something Habermas's model lacks for postcolonial cases: a scale rather than a threshold.⁹ On Popper's scale a society is not simply in or out of the club of publics; it is more or less open, more or less critical of tradition, more or less answered by its rulers, and it can move along the scale in both directions. The Punjab of our period moved repeatedly, opening in the constitutional debates, closing under martial law, opening again under the pressure of agitation, and only a graded concept can follow the motion.

David Gilmartin's research on the Punjab hinted, before the theory arrived, at what an arena-based history could accomplish. His account of the making of Pakistan in the province showed the Muslim League's message travelling through the mediating structures of rural Islam, the Sufi shrines and their hereditary custodians, whose authority rendered an abstract constitutional demand into idioms of loyalty and blessing that a countryside could act upon.¹⁰ Gilmartin's shrines are, in everything but name, Freitag's arenas: sites where politics is performed rather than merely discussed, and where the performance carries consequences that the performers' illiteracy does nothing to diminish. What he demonstrated for the 1940s, the framework below assumes as a standing feature of the decades that followed, when the same shrines turned from making Pakistan to arguing over what it meant.

Five Features of the Postcolonial Punjabi Arena

The first feature of the postcolonial Punjabi arena is multilingualism, and it is structural rather than decorative. The same argument over the character of the state ran simultaneously through an English press led by Dawn and the Pakistan Times, an Urdu press led by Nawa-i-Waqt, Jang, and Imroze, and a periodical culture reaching into Punjabi, and the argument

⁸C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁹Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 2012); Reetz, *Islam in the Public Sphere*.

¹⁰David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988).

changed register as it changed language: constitutional and worldly in English, emotive and civilizational in Urdu, intimate and devotional in Punjabi.¹¹ Habermas's bourgeois debated in one national tongue; the Punjabi public debated in three at once, and translation between them was itself a political act, since every rendering of secular, Islamic, or rights into another idiom shifted the ground of the quarrel. A framework for this arena must treat the traffic between languages as part of the argument, not as noise around it.

The second feature is a continuum of orality and print that makes literacy irrelevant as a ticket of admission. Newspapers were read aloud at shops and in villages; the mushaira, the gathered recitation of poetry, could carry a political argument to hundreds in an evening and, through memory, to thousands afterward; the Friday sermon translated the week's controversies for congregations no editorial could reach; and radio braided all of these together. When Habib Jalib recited his verses against the constitution of 1962, the poem travelled by voice long before and long after it travelled by page, and the regime's displeasure acknowledged its reach.¹² In such a continuum the printed text is one station on a circuit rather than the circuit itself, and the historian who reads only what was printed has overheard perhaps half of the argument.

The third feature is ritual as argument, and it is here that Freitag's revision pays for itself. The calendar of the Punjabi arena was religious: the Prophet's birthday on 12 Rabi-ul-Awwal, the night of 27 Ramadan, the two Eids, the weekly Friday congregation, and above all the urs, the annual festival at a saint's shrine, each an occasion on which the idea of Pakistan was preached, sung, and disputed before publics assembled for worship.¹³ To describe these performances as mere devotion, outside politics, is to repeat the secular architecture of the bourgeois model in a society that never shared it; to describe them as manipulation from above is to insult the intelligence of the assembled. They were arguments, conducted in the grammar of blessing and commemoration, about what kind of state a Muslim homeland ought to be, and the constitutional record shows that the state heard them.

The fourth feature is an entangled state, and it breaks the clean geometry of the original model. Habermas's sphere faces the state across a boundary; the Pakistani state stood inside the arena as a participant, patronizing the shrines through the Auqaf administration that the Ayub regime built to manage religious endowments, subsidizing friendly newspapers and disciplining hostile ones, and in 1959 simply taking over the Progressive Papers, whose dailies had anchored the left of the argument.¹⁴ The entanglement means that state action is evidence about the arena rather than an external interruption of it: a government that buys shrines and confiscates presses is a government that has measured the weight of both. The framework

¹¹Saadia Toor, *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

¹²Habib Jalib, *Kulliyat-e-Habib Jalib* (Lahore: Mawwara, 2005).

¹³Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*.

¹⁴Ayesha Siddiqi, "Sinners and Saints, Soldiers of God: Has Sufism Failed to Counter Radicalism?" *Friday Times* (Lahore), February 16, 2018; Toor, *State of Islam*.

therefore treats censorship, patronage, and takeover not as the end of public life but as moves within it, made by the largest and best-armed of the participants.

The fifth feature is the plurality of rival publics, and the arena is precisely their collision. On one side stood the literary and political left, the Progressive Writers, the study circles of the communists, the trade unions and student federations whose activism Kamran Asdar Ali has reconstructed; on the other, the Jamaat-e-Islami's disciplined cells and publication network, the ulema of the mosque boards, and the devotional publics of the shrines; and across both cut the official public that the state assembled around its own commemorations.¹⁵ None of these publics contained the others, and none could ignore the others, because each claimed to speak for the same Pakistan. The public, in this framework, is not a consensus and not a place; it is the standing contest among these formations, and the historian's unit of study is the collision itself.

Taken together, the five features define an arena rather than a sphere, and the change of noun is a change of theory. The arena is multilingual where the sphere was monoglot, oral and printed where the sphere was textual, ritual-bearing where the sphere was secular, entangled with the state where the sphere faced it, and constitutively plural where the sphere aspired to unity. What survives from Habermas, and it is the part worth keeping, is the causal claim: that organized opinion compels acknowledgement, and that constitutions are among the places where the acknowledgement is written down. The framework thus keeps the destination of the original theory while rebuilding the entire road that leads to it, and the rebuilding is what the Punjabi evidence required.

Reading a Partisan Archive

A framework earns its keep only through the reading protocol it imposes on sources, and the sources for this arena are abundant. The newspaper runs of Nawa-i-Waqt, Jang, Dawn, the Pakistan Times, and Imroze between 1947 and 1977 survive in the Lahore Museum Library, the Quaid-e-Azam Library, and the collections of Government College University, alongside the literary and political magazines, Lail-o-Nihar, Naqoosh, Adab-i-Latif, Saqi, and their fellows, in which the quarrel of the publics was conducted at essay length. To these the protocol adds the proceedings of the constituent and provincial assemblies, where the state's acknowledgement of the arena is on the record, and the memoirs and autobiographies of the editors, poets, and politicians who peopled it.

None of these sources may be taken at face value, because each was produced to win the argument it records. The criticism of the secular idea of Pakistan in Nawa-i-Waqt cannot be accepted as description, and neither can the Pakistan Times's rendering of the religious parties; each is evidence of the debate rather than a neutral report about it, and the operative rule is corroboration across ideologically opposed sources, the rightist daily checked against the leftist, the assembly record against the memoir, the party organ against the rival's polemic. Partisanship, handled this way, ceases to be a defect of the archive and becomes its principal

¹⁵Kamran Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam: Communist Politics and Class Activism in Pakistan, 1947–1972* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

content: what the historian of an arena wants to know is precisely how each side framed the other, and a biased source answers exactly that question.

The hagiographic canon deserves particular notice, because historians have treated it as an embarrassment rather than an archive. The literature of the shrines abounds in exaggeration and in prophecy: Sufi Barakat Ali's collected papers press the claim that the creation of Pakistan was foretold and assigned from the unseen, and Mumtaz Mufti's famous *Alakh Nagri* narrates the state's destiny in frankly mystical terms.¹⁶ Read as reportage, such texts fail every test; read as evidence of popular political theology, they are irreplaceable, documenting a widely shared conviction that Pakistan possessed a sacral meaning which secular argument could not touch. The protocol therefore assigns hagiography the same status as the partisan press: not a window onto events, but a direct record of one public's idea of Pakistan, to be set against the records of its rivals.

Three Demonstrations

The Lahore coffee house is the Punjabi site closest to Habermas's original, and even it deviates instructively. The Pak Tea House on the Mall, with the writers' circle Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq meeting in its rooms, hosted three decades of nightly argument among progressives, liberals, and believers, a scene affectionately documented in K. K. Aziz's memoir of the city's coffee-house culture and in Intizar Husain's recollections of his literary generation.¹⁷ Yet the deviations are the analytically interesting part: the medium was Urdu rather than a colonial English, the characteristic genre was the poem rather than the pamphlet, the clientele mixed salaried men with the precariously unemployed, and the conversation fed directly into the nearby newspaper offices rather than standing apart from them. The Tea House, in short, was already an arena wearing the costume of a sphere.

The shrine supplies the demonstration that the classical model cannot see at all. At the great festivals of the Punjab's saints, publics assembled that no editor could count and no literacy statistic could describe, and there the meaning of Pakistan was expounded in the register of blessing, prophecy, and inheritance, the state figured as a trust conferred rather than a contract drafted. That the argument mattered is confirmed from above: the Ayub regime's construction of the Auqaf administration to manage and patronize the shrines was the act of a state that had measured the political weight of the devotional public and moved to share in it.¹⁸ A framework without ritual would file these gatherings under folklore; the arena framework files them where contemporaries did, under politics.

The Objectives Resolution of 1949 shows the feedback loop running from arena to assembly. When the Constituent Assembly resolved in March 1949 that sovereignty over the universe belongs to Allah, to be exercised by the people of Pakistan as a sacred trust, within limits that

¹⁶Sufi Barakat Ali, *Maqalat-e-Hikmat* (Faisalabad: Dar-ul-Ihsan, n.d.); Mumtaz Mufti, *Alakh Nagri* (Lahore: Al-Faisal, 2006).

¹⁷K. K. Aziz, *The Coffee House of Lahore: A Memoir, 1942–57* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2008); Intizar Husain, *Chiraghon ka Dhuhan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1999).

¹⁸Siddiq, "Sinners and Saints, Soldiers of God."

also promised democracy, fundamental rights, and protection for minorities, it was answering an argument already raging outside its chamber, and the answer immediately re-entered the arena: the religious parties campaigned publicly to teach the Resolution's contents and press its implementation, while their opponents contested its meaning in the columns of the left press.¹⁹ The document, that is, was neither a beginning nor an end but a relay station, receiving the pressure of the publics and transmitting a new object for them to fight over, which is exactly the behaviour the framework predicts of constitutional text.

The agitation of 1953 shows the loop running in both directions, and at a scale no one could ignore. The street campaign in the Punjab demanding the exclusion of the Ahmadi community from the definition of a Muslim brought Lahore to martial law, and the state's reply took the remarkable form of the Court of Inquiry under Justice Muhammad Munir, whose report interrogated the ulema on the very definition of a Muslim and recorded, with famous irony, that no two scholars could agree upon one.²⁰ Here the arena forced the state to convene, in effect, a public seminar on the idea of Pakistan, and the seminar's published proceedings then became one of the most quoted documents of the continuing debate. We treat the episode briefly here, since it belongs substantively to a companion study; its theoretical import is the demonstration that the arena could compel the state not merely to act but to argue.

Limits and Objections

The first objection is conceptual inflation: if every gathering is an arena, the concept explains nothing. The reply is that the framework's features are restrictive in combination. An arena, on this account, requires contest, rival positions publicly maintained before mixed audiences, and it requires uptake, some traceable pressure upon the institutions that answered for the state; a private majlis of the like-minded fails the first test, and a quarrel that never left its neighbourhood fails the second. The five features are not a welcome mat but a checklist, and applying them excludes far more of social life than they admit. What they refuse to do is exclude on the classical grounds, literacy, secularity, and language, that would empty the Punjab of its public before the history had begun.

The second objection is the near-absence of women from the arenas this article has described, and it must be conceded rather than explained away. The Tea House circle, the mushaira platform, and the shrine's public oratory were overwhelmingly male preserves, and a framework that celebrated their openness without saying so would reproduce the exclusion it ought to document. Ryan's lesson from a different century applies: the research task is to trace the struggle over access, the side doors and substitute publics through which women read, listened, corresponded, and judged, rather than to naturalize their absence from the front rooms.²¹ The framework, honestly applied, makes the exclusion visible and measurable,

¹⁹Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, *Debates*, 12 March 1949 (Karachi: Government of Pakistan Press, 1949).

²⁰*Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted under Punjab Act II of 1954 to Enquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953* (Lahore: Government Printing Press, 1954).

²¹Ryan, "Gender and Public Access."

which is the most a concept can do; the recovery of the excluded public is a labour for the histories built upon it.

The third objection is censorship: can a society of press laws, safety acts, and martial law be said to possess a public sphere at all? The objection assumes that suppression and publicness are opposites, when the record suggests they are correlates. A state indifferent to opinion does not draft press ordinances, subsidize loyal editors, or, as in 1959, seize an entire newspaper trust; each of these acts is a costly acknowledgement that the arena was shaping outcomes the state cared about.²² Popper's scale absorbs the point without strain: openness rises and falls, and the fluctuations, the seizures and the thaws alike, are data. The strongest evidence that the Punjabi arena mattered between 1947 and 1977 is precisely the energy successive governments spent trying to manage it.

Conclusion

The framework proposed here keeps Habermas's question while changing his answer sheet. The question, how organized opinion compels states to acknowledge it, remains the most valuable in the theory's inheritance; the answer sheet, coffee house, print, reason, and the vernacular of a single tongue, has been rewritten for a province that argued in three languages, across the boundary of literacy, through the calendar of its faith, against and alongside an entangled state, and in the permanent plural. Nothing in the rewriting is a concession to Punjabi peculiarity; each amendment was forced by evidence, and most of the amendments, we suspect, would be forced again by any postcolonial case examined with equal patience.

The framework is portable, and its portability is a testable claim rather than a boast. The five features can be carried to Sindh, with its own shrine culture and its own press; to East Bengal before 1971, where the language of the argument was itself the argument; and beyond Pakistan to other postcolonial Muslim societies whose publics have been written off for failing a European entrance examination. Venkat Dhulipala has already shown, for the colonial United Provinces, how much history becomes visible when the debate over Pakistan is taken seriously as debate; the present framework is, in one sense, an instrument for extending that seriousness across the frontier of 1947, into the decades when the argument concerned a state that existed.²³

An Islamic Republic, on this account, is what an arguing society wrote down. The constitutions of 1956, 1962, and 1973 each attempted to hold together two seemingly opposite categories, Islam and the republic, and the attempt was not the invention of drafting committees but the settlement, provisional and renegotiated, of a contest conducted in the arenas this article has mapped: the tea house and the newspaper column pressing the republic, the mosque, the shrine, and the procession pressing Islam, and the state manoeuvring among

²²Toor, *State of Islam*.

²³Venkat Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

them all.²⁴ The theoretical claim of this article is a methodological instruction: to understand the documents, recover the argument. The arenas of the Punjab kept the minutes of that argument for thirty years, and they are waiting to be read.

Note: This article is extracted from Muhammad Shafi, “Debating the Idea of Pakistan in Public Arenas: A Case Study of the Punjab (1947–1977)” (PhD diss., Department of History, Institute of Global and Historical Studies, Government College University, Lahore), completed under the supervision of Hussain Ahmad Khan.

²⁴The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1956; The Constitution of the Republic of Pakistan, 1962; The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973.