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Religion and Social Transformation in Medieval India: The Religio-intellectual Movements under Marxist Historiographical Lens in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study examines religious and social change in medieval India from the perspectives of three Pakistani historians from Marxist and progressive historiographical traditions: Sibte Hassan, Mubarak Ali and Kazi Javed. It poses questions about the articulation of material injustices by religious movements, the narration of religious reform and intercultural contact by these historians, and how their views differed from Pakistani Muslim nationalist history. The study covers Ismaili-Qaramatiyya, Bhakti, Sikh, Roshaniyya, Mehdavi and Mujaddidi movements and Akbar's sulh-i kul policy and subsequent Muslim revivalist movements. It is based on a qualitative, comparative reading of the published writings of the historians. This paper contends that a materialist lens shows the links between economic grievances, class inequalities, political power and religious languages of protest. The essay also points out the major differences in the progressive tradition. Javed gives analytical emphasis on philosophical ideas, cultural interaction and syncretism. Hassan puts emphasis on social structure and economic interests. Ali puts emphasis on common people and the limits of reform movements. Their readings challenge narratives focused on the continuity of Muslim communities and the preservation of a distinct religious identity. However, a material explanation is not enough to explain the many institutional, intellectual and spiritual goals of these movements. The comparison of the methods thus shows the limits of interpretation of Marxist historiography and its corrective significance. The paper concludes that medieval South Asian religion is best conceived not as a straightforward theological history nor as an unproblematic reflection of economic concerns, but as a sphere of faith, political contestation, cultural translation and social negotiation all at once. The discussions still have relevance today.

Keywords: *Historiography; Marxism; medieval India; Bhakti; Sufism; Sikhism; Mehdavi; Mujadadiya; Orthodoxy; liberalism; religious reform; social history*

Introduction

Religious ideas were of great importance in Indian politics and society throughout the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, their historical significance was far more than theological. Devotional traditions, mystical affiliations, reformist networks, and organized opposition all influenced social status, regional affiliation, access to political power, and communication between communities. Seen as a static clash between two religious civilizations, these currents obscure the disagreements within each community and the partnerships that crossed communal boundaries. To view religion as nothing more than a means of financial gain is equally reductionist. This essay looks at the Pakistani historians' accounts of religious movements and situates them within these overlapping historical processes.

Pakistan's history is particularly instructive in this kind of inquiry. Since 1947, the origins and persistence of a Muslim communal identity have been a constant theme of historical writing. Religious difference may be the organizing principle for selection, linkage and evaluation of medieval events in leading Muslim nationalist narratives. But some academics raised a range of questions. They examined how religious idioms can articulate social issues, local cultures, class allegiances, and the everyday lives of ordinary people. The institutional context of national history writing deserves study in its own right, as shown by Qasmi (2019) in his study of the construction of a Pakistani historical master narrative. This study does not consider nationalist and Marxist historiographies as monolithic or incompatible fields of inquiry, but rather as distinct interpretive orientations. Three authors are especially relevant. Sibte Hassan challenged the narratives that divided the past of Pakistan from the greater past of the sub-continent, and linked the growth of culture with the material history. Mubarak Ali says the historical explanations should include peasants, artisans and other sectors that have been left out of dynastic narratives. Kazi Javed's intellectual history of Muslim thought and his consideration of Hindu-Muslim cultural contact as a major factor in societal change is a case in point. Their common opposition to exclusive or ruler-centered histories should not obscure their differences over the causal force of ideas, the degree of economic determinism, or the results of particular reform movements.

This investigation preserves the substantive analyzes of movements from the Ismaili and Bhakti traditions to later Islamic revivalism in the paper, but reorganizes their presentation around a more obvious historiographical problem: how is religious change explained, whose experience counts as historically consequential, and what normative standards are used to judge reform? This argument is deliberately comparative. So a reformist idiom could favor division of the community, but oppose established privilege; a movement could promote spiritual equality, but sustain relations of property. Recognizing these tensions permits us to assess the historical claims of both historiographical traditions without assuming that one has a monopoly on explanation.

Research Questions

This discourse of the present study revolves around the following questions.

1. What were the social and economic factors that affected religious movements in medieval India according to Sibte Hassan, Mubarak Ali and Kazi Javed?

2. How alike or unlike are their narratives concerning syncretism, religious reform, and the historical boundaries of devotional movements?
3. How are their theories of religious change different from the Pakistani Muslim nationalist historiography?

Study Design and Historical Approach

This is not a reconstruction on the basis of recently discovered medieval texts. This is qualitative historiographical research. The study is focused on the views of Sibte Hassan, Mubarak Ali and Kazi Javed in comparison to the writings related to Muslim nationalist history. The debate juxtaposes their interpretations of causes, social constituency, modes of religious expression and effects. The historians' reliance on references to medieval movements distinguishes their claims from independently verifiable historical facts. Claims without a verified page are not given fictional pagination; parenthetical page references are to the editions listed in the reference list where the original article provided page proof.

The terms 'Muslim nationalist' and 'Marxist' are used here as general tendencies, not as strict academic identities. The former comprises the distinction between popular social history, humanistic intellectual history, and structural materialism. The latter includes scholars with a range of research methods and interpretative foci. Such qualifiers are relevant where retrospective normative judgments are made, such as 'progressive', 'orthodox', or 'syncretic'.

The following short biographies are intended to show the philosophical position of the historians, but do not substitute analysis for biography. In the following sections, their published interpretations are used as historiographical evidence, setting them apart from those that have been independently verified by contemporary research.

Three Marxist & Progressive Historians of Pakistan

Sibte Hassan (1916–1986) was a leading Urdu journalist, historian, and socialist philosopher who was a member of the Progressive Writers' movement and helped to develop a social and materialist view of the history of the subcontinent. Born in Azamgarh in northern India, he was active in literary and journalistic circles before becoming one of the leading intellectual figures in Pakistan. In his books and his journalism, he continued to connect cultural criticism with historical explanation, even when he was imprisoned or placed under surveillance for his political views. In *Pakistan mein Tehzib ka Irtiqa* he argued that the region's history should not be viewed merely as a series of dynasties, nor as an independent Muslim political inheritance. Instead, he looked at the relationship between religious expression, social protest, regional cultures and economic injustice. His readings of the Ismailis, Bhakti, Roshaniyya and revivalist groups are critical to the present inquiry as they recover the social constituencies that conventional political narratives may miss (Hassan, 1975, pp. 159–162, 207–229, 310–326).

Mubarak Ali, born in 1941, is a professionally trained historian associated with a history-from-below perspective and the democratization of historical knowledge. Born in Tonk, he moved with his family to Hyderabad, Sindh in 1952. He studied history at the University of Sindh and did his PhD studies at Ruhr University Bochum in Germany. His writings are remarkable particularly for their readable Urdu language and their insistence

on the representation of common people, marginalized groups and social structures in historical explanations. His intellectual formation was the consequence of a long-term involvement with Marxist literature. His writings include on topics such as Sindh history, Mughal history, historiographical methodology and memory politics. Did movements like Bhakti change material realities and everyday hierarchies, he asks, instead of measuring reform by its stated principles. His own observations provide context for institutional and societal issues that affect his work (Ahmad, 2013, pp. 7–8; Ali, 2012b, pp. 51–53, 68–69, 81–86; Ali, 2012c, pp. 12–16).

Kazi Javed (1956–2020), also known as Kazi Javed, was a progressive scholar, journalist, philosopher and historian of ideas from Lahore. Educated in philosophy at the University of the Punjab, he remained active in Pakistani literary and cultural institutions and published widely on South Asian Muslim philosophy, philosophical traditions, religious reform, and cross-cultural exchange. He did not employ a closed narrative of communal identity, but dealt with the intellectual history of Indian Muslims in *Barr-e-Sagheer mein Muslim Fikr ka Irtiqa* and *Hindi Muslim Tehzib* through interactions between religious groups. In his writings he particularly focuses on Sufi ideas, Bhakti and Sikh philosophy, Akbar's religious policies and the conflicting views of reformers and revivalists (Javed, 1977, pp. 69–96; Javed, 2010, pp. 23–43). Although frequently discussed with Marxist researchers, his interpretative repertory also includes philosophical and humanist issues, so the designation should be seen as a wide progressive affinity rather than as evidence of a purely economic determinist approach.

Comparing Marxist and Muslim Nationalist Historiography in Pakistan

The differences start, is the issue at the heart of both Muslim nationalist and Marxist history in Pakistan. The typical nationalist narrative considers how a Muslim political, cultural and religious group maintained or regained its singularity in the subcontinent. Conversely, a materialist or socially oriented history starts with the distribution of power, resources and opportunities, and asks about the ways in which some communities experienced religious transformation. Neither strategy necessarily rules out politics or religion. Where they differ is in the explanatory importance they attach to community identity as opposed to social interaction and historical struggle. Hassan's discussion of cultural history stresses the long history of interaction among regional communities, while Qureshi's work on the cohesion of the Muslim community and politics provides a useful nationalist benchmark (Hassan, 1975, pp. 159–162; Qureshi, 2003).

Also, they have different periodizations. The histories of Muslim political presence typically focus on conquest, dynastic rule, religious reform and the conditions that made possible contemporary Muslim nationhood. Longer continuities, social and cultural, that cut across regimes and religious barriers are more easily exposed by Marxist stories. The difference is particularly striking in the way the Ismailis of Multan are treated. As the source document states, Hassan saw the *Qaramatiyya's* actions as a protest against social injustice and political hegemony, but nationalistic enemies described them in doctrinal counterproductive terms (Hassan, 1975, pp. 161–162). One interpretation sees the key issue as religious legitimacy, another as the constituency of the movement and its relations with the governing class. Both questions require careful source criticism.

But when you consider the historian's archive, the disparity is even more stark. A story primarily about state communication, elite chronicles, theological conflict and dynastic succession is better at reconstructing claims of doctrine and sovereignty, but less good at explaining why farmers or craftsmen followed a particular religious instructor. But merely reversing the moral vocabulary of a chronicle does not construct a social history of such followers. It calls for attention to agricultural linkages, settlement patterns, patronage, vernacular customs and the conditions of text production. Qasmi (2019) traced the institutional development of the nationalist master narrative, following Ghaznavi (1974) who had in particular highlighted perspective as a problem in Muslim history. In sum, their research proves the necessity of historicizing historiography. The present comparison is therefore a study of the facts and causal assumptions which give meaning to the history of a movement, and not a judgment on its religious truth.

A further parallel is between Sikhism and Bhakti. An identity narrative may also emphasize the theological differences between the established religions and the later development of a distinct Sikh identity. Instead, the three progressive historians emphasize cultural interchange, caste critique, and religious languages. And even among themselves there is not enough agreement. While Javed also acknowledges far earlier devotional antecedents, which is a crucial caveat to a purely diffusionist interpretation, Hassan links Bhakti to the wider contact between Islamic and indigenous traditions (Hassan, 1975, pp. 209–210; Javed, 2010, pp. 23–24). Another difference is that Ali's critique of the inability of devotional reform to subvert entrenched systems reveals that religious inclusivity and economic freedom are not always synonymous (Ali, 2012c, pp. 12–16).

A third test of interpretation is Akbar's sulh-i kul policy. In narratives privileging communal consolidation, imperial religious tolerance may be assessed in terms of its impact on Muslim cohesion. Instead, Javed examines the policy in the intellectual and cultural context of the interaction between traditions. And so the question of whether tolerance was desirable is not the only question in issue (Javed, 1977, pp. 95–96). It is to do with what makes up a successful social or political development in the historical data. This same division can be seen in Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi and later revivalists. But the progressive critique of exclusivism is also a challenge to the nationalist desire to preserve religious identity. Theological assertions must be set in context of reformers' internal conflicts and economic considerations (Javed, 2009, pp. 84–93, 161–169).

Instead of flattening these frameworks, outline their advantages and disadvantages. Muslim nationalist history emphasizes institutions, legal customs and communal memory, but may underestimate shared social worlds and internal class differences. Marxist history raises important questions about labor, hierarchy and dominance, but risks comparing earlier movements with later revolutionary aspirations or using ideology to disguise earlier economic motives. Cultural and religious change cannot always be reduced to a dichotomy of syncretic union versus communal division. Movements negotiated political survival, reinforced doctrinal boundaries and accommodated local custom, all at once. Comparative history is at its best when it takes these contemporaneous processes into account and examines source evidence rather than accepting inherited praise or criticism.

Thematic Analysis of Religious Movements and Social Change

Marxist history examines different socio-religious and political groups such as liberal groups including Ismailis, Shattaris, Madaris, Bhakti and Roshaniyya and Muslim renaissance movements including Mehdi, Mujaddidi, Faraizi and Jihad movements. It provides a powerful critique of their beliefs, goals, tactics, successes and failures.

1. Social and Economic Factors Affecting Religious Activism

Many socio-religious organizations that rose in medieval India, according to Marxist historians like Sibte Hassan, were the answer of oppressed people to economic, political and social injustices. The leaders of these movements used religious terminology to express their views, although they were born out of political and economic factors. It gives the impression that all the movements that started in Indian society were religious, as that was the norm at that time (Hassan, 1975, pp. 159–160). All the movements were responses of the lower class to their rulers and they used religious language to mobilize the general populace.

Another important factor that helped in the formation of these groups, according to Kazi Javed, was the long historical process of contact between Hindus and Muslims and the resultant evolution of the syncretic culture. This was, he said, the result of a dialectical process between the two different civilizations, Islam and Hinduism, which led to the development of syncretic culture (Javed, 1977, pp. 69–82). But some of the groups represented liberalism, adaptability, reconciliation and syncretism, and some expressed separatist impulses on both sides.

It is especially useful in understanding the processes by which adversity and collective action were linked—who owned property, how surplus was accumulated, what legal or ceremonial privileges were maintained, and where followers found forms of solidarity. But to say that all religious movements were essentially economic blurs distinctions between different groups and times. Conflicts over theology, accessibility of language, spiritual authority and patronage may inspire followers. Javed's focus on interaction enlarges the scope of the investigation, but sharing practices does not always lead to a shared culture. A fuller account would need to explain how cultural borrowing occurred, whether or not it was reciprocal, and whether actors opposed it. Rather than seeing conversion as a single ideological event, Eaton's study of the evolution of Islam in Bengal ties religious transformation to agricultural growth and regional dynamics (Eaton, 1993). This is a methodological comparison, not evidence of similar circumstances elsewhere.

2. Ismaili-Qaramatiyya of Multan: Rebellion, Authority and Belief

Sibte Hassan is not happy with the way Muslim nationalist historians have handled the Ismaili movement that was born and blossomed in the Multan area. He argues that Muslim nationalist historians deliberately overlooked its historical importance and sought to defame it and its leadership by branding them as non-Muslims and heretics. Hassan illuminates various historical aspects of the Multan Ismailis, including their origins and the character of the movement. This revolution, he said, was the oppressed people of Multan rising against the political and social injustices of their time. Muslim nationalist historians have denounced the Ismaili Sufi and missionary method of spreading Islam as heretical, and have labeled the Ismailis a heretical sect, because their understanding of

Islam was not puritanical. Sibte Hassan, however, respects the Ismailis because they tried to convert the people but still retained their cultural and social links, without even asking them to change their Islamic names (Hassan, 1975, pp. 161–162).

Hassan's participation is important because the words "heretic" and "legitimate ruler" are sometimes the point of view of an opposition movement. His sociological reading provokes an inquiry into supporters beyond the court, and the possible attraction of other forms of authority. But it is important to distinguish the specific organizations and Ismaili networks active in Multan from the early Qaramatiyya movement in West Asia. They overlap in their histories, but they are not interchangeable (Hassan, 1975, pp. 161–162). A complete causal explanation would have to consider whether the majority of local adherents were craftsmen and peasants, how the government managed its finances, and whether the surviving reports accurately represent its religious practices. To replace it with an explicit commendation would merely invert a sectarian condemnation. Instead, the historical achievement is in rethinking questions of local accommodation, political legitimacy, and the social uses of religious diversity.

3. Bhakti, Vernacular Devotions, and Cultural Interaction

Another historical and theological movement that interested the Marxist historians in Pakistan was the Bhakti movement. The Bhakti movement started in the twelfth century CE and became immensely popular in northern India during the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries CE. The movement is discussed by the historians, who disagree about its character and aims. Some believe that the Bhakti movement was started by some Hindu reformers who were inspired by Islam's promise of equality to reform Hindu society. Some say it was a Hindu campaign to convert Muslims who were originally Hindus. "It was an effort by some to integrate the Muslims into the Hindu culture and society." To others it was in fact a protest against the tyranny brought about by Indian feudalism (Ali, 2012c, pp. 12–15; Hassan, 1975, pp. 207–208).

Marxist historian Sibte Hassan thinks that Bhakti movement was an Indian Sufism. He sheds light on the essence of the Bhakti movement. It was the product of the unique social climate of the country. Hassan is of the opinion that the liberalism of Ismaili missionaries who settled in Malabar, Konkan (or Concan), Coromandel and the southern coastal regions of Sindh and Gujarat is responsible for the growth of the community. As proof of this he offers textual evidence and claims that the Ten Avatars, which show Allah as Brahma, the Prophet Adam as Shiva and the Caliph Ali as Vishnu, are among the holy texts of the Ismailis. He further states that Syed Imamuddin Ismaili is the founder of one of the branches of Bhakti movement, Satpanthi. Sibte Hassan's Pakistan mein Tehzib ka Irtiqa tries to give an interesting example of Hindu-Muslim syncretism in the leaders of Bhakti movement and Sufis.

In his account "*Tarikh ki Awaz*", Mubarak Ali identifies three major features of the Bhakti movement and praises them. Firstly, the missionaries of the Bhakti movement were from the lower strata of society; secondly, the movement was against religious extremism, orthodoxy and bigotry; and, thirdly, the exponents of the movement used poetry in different forms to propagate their message among the masses (Ali, 2012c, pp. 12–16).

Kazi Javed's project *Bare Saghir mein Muslim Fikr ka Irtiqa* (1977) had argued that the Bhakti movement in India was the result of Hindu-Muslim contact and a kind of cultural syncretism. Says he, it was "a result of conscious efforts which were made to develop a synthesis between the two great civilizations [the Islamic and the Hindu]." But in his treatise *Tarikh-o Tehzib* (2010), he presents an alternative theory regarding its genesis, arguing that the term Bhakti appears in the Puranas (the sacred texts of Hinduism). Thus, Bhakti was an Indian ancient devotional movement, which revived in the Middle Ages. Like Sufism in Islam, Bhakti was a mystical movement in Hinduism, Javed goes on to say (Javed, 1977, p. 69; Javed, 2010, pp. 23–24).

Another problem is the perception of Bhakti as a unified medieval organization with common social objectives. The devotional customs varied greatly in different regions, languages, theology and institutions. Some encouraged devotion to a god in a particular form and others emphasized an unqualified divine presence. They differed in their views on caste and the privilege of ritual. Hawley (2015) has demonstrated how subsequently historical and nationalist narratives construct the familiar notion of a unitary, all-India "Bhakti movement." This caveat, far from diminishing the interest of Pakistani historians in vernacular devotion, strengthens it. It requires that specific poets, audiences, oral and written traditions, and patronage pathways be investigated before any general political motive is assigned to them. By taking into account earlier Indic religious roots, Javed challenges the idea that devotional practice emerged only through Islamic influence and argues that interactions between traditions should be understood as historically contextual exchanges (Javed, 2010, pp. 23–24).

3.1 The Limits of Bhakti as a Reform Method

Sibte Hassan discusses the reasons behind the failure of the Bhakti movement to alter India's socio-economic structure. He says that the founders wanted to create an equitable society and were against social injustice and economic tyranny, but they did not know that social relations are shaped by economic structures and not by ideas. He also stresses that the Bhakti movement had no agenda of bringing social revolution (Hassan, 1975, p. 223). But Mubarak Ali is critical about the strategy of its leaders. He says that they did not pay attention to urban people and only preached to rural people. Moreover, he criticizes their theological position, claiming that the movement had no plan to change society as a whole, but was primarily concerned with individual salvation (Ali, 2012c, pp. 12–16).

3.2 Bhakti and the Social Impact of Sectarian Diversity

Mubarak Ali analyzes why the Bhakti movement failed to create an egalitarian society and later divided into factions or sects. The two major ones were Saguna (that God manifests in different forms) and Nirguna (that God is omnipotent). Each movement party, he says, had a different impact on society. Important personalities of the Bhakti movement like Bhakta Ramadas first introduced Bhakti nationalism. He bestowed his organization with the Maharashtra-Dharma, a form of dharma that granted its leaders political ambitions to forge Hindu hegemony. After this, the organization made an alliance with Shiva Ji and its followers fought against Mughals to get their freedom. Similarly, Guru Nanak preached Nirguna Bhakti, but his progeny became a radical and militant sect. Ali said that the movement did not bring any meaningful and constructive change in

Indian society as the leaders lacked a common goal and concentrated their efforts as well as religious extremism and militancy (Ali, 2012c, pp. 12–16).

4. Sikhism, Religious Community and Caste Criticism

According to Marxist historians, Sikhism is a part of the Bhakti movement, a religion that was started by Guru Nanak in sixteenth century CE. In *Pakistan mein Tehzib ka Irtiqa*, Sibte Hassan describes the life of Guru Nanak and development of his religious ideas and concludes that he was influenced by Islamic teachings. He says Nanak was disappointed by the worldly mentality of the ulema and introduced Sikhism, a separate religion. Nanak was born in a Hindu family but was deeply influenced by the teachings of Islam and the personality of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Nanak was angry with the Hindus and the Muslim clergy and announced his own way of enlightenment (Hassan, 1975, pp. 225–226; Javed, 1977, p. 75).

Javed, in his works *Bare Saghir mein Muslim Fikr ka Irtiqa* and *Hindi Muslim Tehzib*, examines the causes and aims of the growth of Sikhism and the Bhakti movement and how they differed from Islam and Hinduism. He cites two main reasons for the growth of Sikhism in India: the rejection of the caste system and the influence of Islam on the Hindu culture. Kazi Javed explains thatGuru Nanak believed the theological texts of both Islam and Hinduism to be false. That is the difference between Sikhism and Islam and Hinduism. He argues that Sikhism did contain the systematic expression of the efforts of Kabir, Nanak and several other Bhakti proponents to combat racial, ethnic and religious bias. He also says that they fought against the ruling classes and their efforts bore fruit when the Mughals came to power, especially under Akbar (Javed, 1977, pp. 69–82; Javed, 1983, pp. 211–213; Javed, 2010, pp. 23–29).

The Sikh case too demonstrates the dangers of narrating the history of a later structured tradition in terms of the aims of a single founder. Connected but distinct historical periods, with the rise of communities around successive Gurus, the teachings of Nanak, and later the political-military advances. The idea that later militancy is just the reverse of an earlier accommodating posture does not take into account the circumstances in which institutions evolved. Moreover, the effect of Islam and India should not dilute the doctrinal distinctiveness of Sikh doctrine. Javed's rejection of rigid civilizational separation is useful as a critique of self-contained national histories, but it must be combined with consideration for the autonomous activity of Sikh groups (Javed, 1977, pp. 75–81). One has to take into account social location, dedication, institutional consolidation, political struggle all at the same time, not thinking that one exhausts the others.

5. Akbar's Sulh-i Kul and the Politics of Accommodation

"Sulh-e Kul and Din-e Ilahi were not movements but the religious policies of Mughal Emperor Akbar which were a reaction to India's syncretism," said Kazi Javed. He opined that the Chishti Sufis, the Bhakti movement and Sikhism propagated beliefs which were instrumental in the establishment of Akbar's Sulhe Kul policy (Javed, 1977, pp. 95–96; Javed, 1983, pp. 213–217; Javed, 2010, pp. 37–39). Akbar's policies are a striking example of how difficult it is to disentangle belief from governance. The notion of world peace was about morality and intellect, but an empire with a variety of religions also had to build working relationships between generals, local intermediaries, and taxpaying communities.

To regard Sulh-i Kul as merely a charitable declaration of tolerance is to miss these political circumstances. But if it is reduced to imperial expediency alone it does a disservice to the language of ethical norm by which it was represented. Alam (2004) places Indo-Muslim political philosophy in the wider context of cultural pluralism. Javed's argument, combined with this perspective, renders religious tolerance intelligible as a negotiated expression of political power, and an intellectual advance. It also helps to separate the much more focused debates about Din-e Ilahi from the overarching notion of Sulh-e Kul.

6. The Roshaniyya: Religious Dissent and Pashtun Regionalism

Marxist historians like Sibte Hassan have praised the Roshaniyya Movement, founded in Kafigram, Waziristan, by Miyan Bayazid Ansari (known as Pir Roshan) (1525-1576), for its promotion and advocacy of the mystic idea of Wahdut-ul-Wajud. Thus, the ulema called Bayazid Ansari a plunderer, heretic and unbeliever. Another admirable aspect of this movement, he says, is its regionalism. He considers it an age of a popular Pathan movement which aimed at restoring Pashtun culture and overthrowing the governmental control of the Mughals. "It was also a manifestation of the political tension that exists between the Turks and the Afghans, two ethnic groups who share power in India," he propounds (Hassan, 1975, pp. 310–312).

The Roshaniyya shows how religion and geography can be mutually constitutive. Bayazid Ansari's teachings are read as a protest against Mughal rule and the Pashtun communities regain their political agency. It also contests narratives that claim that opposition to empire was inherently chaotic. But it is incorrect to assume that regional mobilization is representative of all Pashtuns or one class. Faith-based networks might activate followers who have many different backgrounds and motivations. The analytical question is if the evidence allows for distinctions between opposition to imperial systems, tribal politics, cultural authority, and personal discipleship (Hassan, 1975, pp. 310–312). Thus, Hassan's emphasis on regional autonomy expands the scope of Marxist social history, but its most compelling version challenges the idea that all dissent is indicative of one revolutionary program.

7. Puritan and Revivalist Reactions to Accommodation

In response to the liberal tendencies of the rulers like Akbar, the Sufis and the Bhakti movement's proponents who were inclined toward liberalism, adopted the Hindu culture and traditions and showed dissent toward the Sharia. Some intellectuals and ideologues such as Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi and Shah Wali Ullah and his disciples, stressed the exclusive and distinct identity of the Muslims, the renaissance of Islamic values and traditions and the practice of Sharia. This Muslim puritanical school was subject to critique by Marxist historians and the problematic nature of the separatist identity movements in the sociocultural context of India was emphasized (Javed, 1977, pp. 95–163; Javed, 1983, pp. 217–230; Javed, 1993b, p. 62; Javed, 2010, pp. 39–43).

7.1 Reform by Mehdavi and Land Questions

Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri (1443-1504) founded the Mehdavi Movement, which aimed to restore the practices of Islam that existed at the time of the Prophet Muhammad. It started with the annexation of Jaunpur to the Delhi Sultanate by Sultan Bahlul Lodhi after he defeated Sultan Hussain Sharqi (r. 1458–1476). Sayyid Muhammad Jaunpuri was

dedicated to restoring the power of Islam because he saw the fall of Jaunpur as a sign of Islam. According to Marxist historian Sibte Hassan, his movement was a reaction to Bhakti movement which was meant to stop the merging of Islam with Hindu customs by analyzing the sociopolitical conditions of his times. With admiration, Hassan points to the communist ideas that the Mehdavi authorities and the state are propagating. The followers of the movement, called the Mehdavi, were against private property ownership. They professed it that Islam supports sharing personal property and does not support the right to own it. So many of the people who joined the Mehdavi movement donated what they owned to the local community. Perhaps that is the reason the nobles and the theologians were so hostile toward the Mehdavis (Hassan, 1975, p. 229).

The Mehdavi example demonstrates how a doctrinal restoration movement can simultaneously experiment with attitudes toward ownership and community responsibility. This mix makes it difficult to draw a clear line between what are claimed to be liberal syncretic movements and conservative revivalist ones. But it is important not to confuse religious generosity or communal property with modern communism, for such actions may have been due to collective self-help and devotional discipline. And it is necessary to rebuild the link between spiritual goals and common economic structures, rather than presume it.

7.2 Religious Politics in Mughal India and Mujaddidi Thought

Orthodox ulema like Shaykh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri and Shaykh Abdul Haqq Muhadith Dehlavi and especially Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi reacted against Mughal religious policies such as *Sulhe Kul* and *Din-e-Ilahi*. These figures, in particular Sirhindi, who offered the mystic philosophy of *Wahdat-us-Shuhud* as a systematic theological critique of the liberal Indian sufis, have been criticized by the Marxist historians, Sibte Hassan and Kazi Javed. They quote Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi and excerpts from Emperor Jahangir's memoirs, *Tuzk-e-Jahagiri*, to show that Sirhindi was an egoist, conservative and orthodox theologian (Javed, 1977, pp. 140–144). These historians depict him as an enemy of reason, science and philosophy. They say that Jahangir, the Mughal emperor, had him imprisoned for being a demagogue who stirred up trouble (Hassan, 1975, pp. 323–326; Javed, 1977, pp. 132–163). Javed also attacks the mystic and philosophical ideas of Sirhindi to defend his traditional stand on many issues. Javed criticized his Wahdat-us-Shahud doctrine, saying it promoted communalism, religious exclusivism, cynicism and even division among Indian Muslims (Javed, 1977, pp. 146–162; Javed, 1983, pp. 217–230; Javed, 2010, pp. 39–43).

The historian should not take the controversial language of Sirhindi as his uncritical account. Javed criticizes the exclusivist effects he finds in attacks on accommodations and Wahdat al-shuhud. Nevertheless, religious differences cannot be evaluated on the basis of their supposed future effect on politics. Separate explanations of their philosophical ancestry, connection to Sufi practice, and current authority issues. It is also necessary to distinguish between Sirhindi's own views and those of his adversaries, imperial chroniclers and later interpreters. This is not to preclude progressive critique; it is simply to set out the standard of proof one should apply in weighing grave charges of bias, irrationality, or political disloyalty. More generally, the question is how competing vocabularies of reform

delineated the boundaries of imperial toleration and the religious lives of believers (Hassan, 1975, pp. 323–326; Javed, 1977, pp. 132–163).

7.3 The Limits of Revivalist Politics and Later Mughal Reformism

As the Mughal Empire entered decline in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, revivalist religio-political movements were initiated by Muslim reformists like Shah WaliUllah, and later reformers associated with similar traditions like Haji Shariat Ullah, Shah Ismail Shaheed and Syed Ahmad Shaheed. Mubarak Ali and Kazi Javed, two historians, carefully examine critically these revivalist groups. Javed likes Shah Wali Ullah because he explains the economic reasons for the fall of the Mughal Empire. However, Kazi Javed and Mubarak Ali criticize Shah Wali Ullah's practical approach toward social change and the plan he made to save Indian Muslims from their political downfall. These historians are critical of the Jihadist movement of these reformers as they believe that the issues with the Mughal Empire were economic, but these reformers suggested conversion of the populace to Islam would solve every issue (Ali, 1992, pp. 32–33, 85–92; Ali, 2012a, pp. 60–99; Javed, 1977, pp. 200–227; Javed, 1983, pp. 235–280; Javed, 2009, pp. 161–174). Javed continues, "Their leaders fought battles with India's non-Muslim population, making the country more vulnerable to European colonial powers (Javed, 1977, pp. 221, 22–224; Javed, 2009, pp. 84–93, 139–140, 144–148, 154; Javed, 2010, pp. 87–92). He also accuses the reformists and revivalists of misreading their true foe. He says the Muslim insurgents were a danger to the Mughal Empire and the real danger was the British, while the real danger was the British Javed, 2009, pp. 166–168).

If these moves are combined into one interpretative sequence, chronology matters. The Faraizi movement under the leadership of Haji Shariatullah arose in the nineteenth century in quite different political and colonial conditions, whereas Shah Wali Allah was a product of the eighteenth-century Mughal milieu. Thus, the latter should be seen as a later inheritor of Islamic reformist concerns, rather than a direct project of Shah Wali Allah's inner circle. Furthermore, violent resistance and reform are not one continuous agenda. Ali and Javed's objections pose a useful question: to what extent can religious resurgence respond to political and economic collapse? The answer depends on identifying the institutions, goals and direct rivals of each movement. There were also regional variations in the course of European expansion. Historical explanation should show these relationships across time and evidence, rather than ascribing a common approach or failure to all revivalists (Ali, 1992, pp. 85–92; Javed, 2009, pp. 161–174).

Conclusion and Analytical Summary

Overall, the case studies suggest a contrast between changes in institutional ties and shifts in ethical imagination. An anti-imperial movement can endorse regional autonomy but continue its own forms of social exclusion; bhakti poetry can oppose religious hierarchy but leave intact caste and landholding patterns. Economic distress, on the other hand, may spawn revivalist demands for doctrinal discipline, but the fear cannot fully account for them. A historian's report must demonstrate a causal relation and not deduce it from fortuitous occurrences. Hassan's economic arguments are most persuasive when buttressed by data on followers, resources and authority; Ali's arguments about social

consequences require a similar level of detail; and Javed's cultural synthesis must not assume that interaction invariably produced peaceful outcomes.

The comparison conclusion is not that religious concepts are not of historical significance in themselves. Instead, institutions and networks were used to render ideas attractive, and those networks might be reconfigured by the ideas themselves. Such a mutual understanding can uphold the critique of elite-centered storytelling in the original paper but can also enhance any over-categorical evaluations of religious leaders or communities. It also recognizes the variety of medieval India, and the fact that not all social groups, languages and geographical areas experienced the same movement in the same way.

Finally, Pakistani Marxist historians have highlighted liberal, progressive, secular and leftist principles to discuss various Marxist historiographical problems regarding the role of religion in South Asian historical processes. These ideals have been presented by them in challenging the Muslim nationalist historiography. They have revered and respected the leaders, sufis and groups they consider to be progressive, liberal and secular, promoting Hindu-Muslim syncretism and inter-community cooperation. They have scathingly targeted those historical characters who were anti-Hindu, conservative, orthodox and communalists, especially the ulema. Though there have been different opinions and some self-contradictions in their arguments, as seen in Mubarak Ali on the spread of Islam in India, Marxist historians have been very strong supporters of individual rights, social and religious freedom, democratic and humanist values, and fierce opponents of religious orthodoxy, conservative behaviors, political and economic oppression and the forces of status quo.

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