Recovering Minority Pasts:
New Writings on Muslims in South Asia

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Arshad Alam, *Inside a Madrasa: Knowledge, Power and Islamic Identity in India.* New Delhi: Routledge, 2011, 220 pages, 9780415678070, Price £70.00.

Anna Bigelow, *Sharing The Sacred: Practising Pluralism in Muslim North India.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 328 pages, 9780195368239, £45.00.

Justin Jones, *Shia Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 304 pages, 9781107004603, Price £60.00.

Ali Usman Qasmi, *Questioning the Authority of the Past: The Ahl al-Quran Movements in the Punjab*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011, 500 pages, 9780195473483, Price £15.99.

Muslim identity politics in colonial India has been a subject of rich scholarly debate. Existing studies have contributed towards building our understanding of South Asian Islam. However, these studies have privileged the grand master narrative that assumes the overarching uniform impact of political and religious movements. The scholarly emphasis has been on how the diversities of local identities and histories were submerged in the formation of a homogeneous Muslim religious community and the project of a Muslim nation state. Thus, categories like "Islamic Revivalism" (Metcalf 1982) and "Muslim Separatism" (Robinson 1974) have become landmarks to map diverse Muslim experiences of politics and religion in colonial India. While these categories have provided an important entry point, they have also brought undesired closures to the other possible ways of understanding Muslim negotiations with politics

and religion. Much focus has also remained on the textual and 'norma-tive' aspect of Islam which often neglects 'lived' local diversities of Mus-lim identities and histories.

The persistence in using Islam as a yardstick to understand diverse lives of Muslims is uninformed, if not completely wrong. The emphasis has been to define a universal category of Muslim identity with shared similarity and marked difference. As critics have pointed out neither such commonalities nor differences are universal but rather negotiated in local contexts. We discover Islam and Muslim as one category nei-ther in the archive nor in the field. What we find instead is Islam as a constantly debated discursive tradition in and across various local and translocal contexts. These everyday negotiations of Islam in the realm of thinking and acting are deeply contextual and individual (Marsden 2005).

The books under review are new attempts to illuminate the richness of South Asian contexts and responses they generated in formations and contestations of Muslim identity. Let us therefore start with the is-sue of Muslim identity politics and its trajectories in colonial India that forms the subject of Justin Jones (2012) *Shia Islam in Colonial India: Religion, Community and Sectarianism.* The book brings to our notice the hitherto ignored histories of Shia Islam in colonial India. In a re-markable omission in the existing writings on South Asian Islam, gen-eralizations were drawn from the history of Sunni Islam and its various maslaks (schools of thought), ignoring the salience of Shiite religious and political role in colonial India. Jones' work is a refreshing synthesis of detailed archival studies of colonial knowledge production about re-ligious community and its limits in a period of enhanced sectarianism.

Jones focuses on the post-1880s transformations in Shia Islam that culminated into, among other things, the sectarian crisis of the 1930s in colonial India. However, this is not an easy narrative of construction and consolidation of identity. Instead, Jones excavates far more interesting histories of transformation, particularly those that lead to institution-alisation and politicisation of religious practices. Jones traces the origin and relation of Shia cultural and religious practices to the ruling dynas-ties, especially in Awadh. While the Shia dynasty was based in Lucknow, it also influenced the socio-religious culture of Rohillkhand and the Doab region. Tied with Nawabi royalty and elite class culture, Shia Islam was equated with high status and respectability. Jones goes on to explore the expansion of Shia Islam to other sections of society, including non-

Muslims, most notably through the popularity of Shia literary and visual public culture such as the Muharram celebration. It is in the social realm that Shia Islam shaped a great deal of South Asian Muslim culture and Lucknow became synonymous with Shia culture in India (Cole 1988).

Apart from the class and cultural politics of Shia Islam, religious contestation was the other side of this story. After the end of the Awadh dynasty and violent jolt of 1857, Amroha, Barabanki, among other qasbas with landed elite lineages and families, became the new centre of Shia learning and attracted Shia scholars and clergy. This made Shias a small but influential segment of United Provinces' Muslim milieu. The transformation from ruling elite to a minority has to be seen within the changing colonial context and also against the rise of politics of classification and numbers. Jones nevertheless also warns us not to imagine a harmonic composite Muslim cosmopolitanism that existed before the colonial encounter. But he does agree that it was only in the colonial period that "a cluster of doctrines, rituals and cultural identifiers were rationalized into a systematic Shia religion" (Jones 2012: 18). The colonial modern context of travel and writing through the power of steam and print was a major factor in creating Shia international linkages. Further, it also forged a distinctly Hindustani or India-specific Shia Islamic public culture which was "functionally independent" of the Shia International (Ibid.: 20).

This particular India specificity is important to be kept in mind as it gets entangled with the internal logic of Muslim religious and political contexts and creation of an enemy within the community. This argument unsettles the flippant usage of the idea of one unified Muslim Community itself. These contestations were not just limited to polemical writing or what Jones calls "violence of the word" (Jones 2012: 21) but also manifested in public violence. Interestingly these internal differences troubled the colonial state when Shia representatives made demands for separate enumeration in census as a mark of their distinctness from their fellow Muslim brethren.

This other history of South Asian Islam has been written as the rise of sectarianism but Jones rightly points out that there is more to these terms than uniformity. Sectarianism for Jones is a diffuse term and he cautions us that "[...] it risks forging links between varieties of unconnected or localized disputes by bringing them under the same abstract Meta narrative" (Jones 2012: 22). Jones suggests a more nuanced interrogation of these issues on their own terms. To his credit, he man-

ages to foreground multiple dimensions of the different understanding and politics of Shia Islam by looking at both colonial and vernacular knowledge production on the issue of sectarianism. Jones highlights the shifting discursive process of sectarianism and shows this particularly through an impressive usage of vernacular Urdu sources that reveal various meanings and understandings of Shia Islam in colonial India.

The late nineteenth century context therefore is an apt starting point to map these different understandings and trajectories of Shia Islam. Jones documents these transformations by focusing on certain key issues. These include the institutional transformation of Shia Islam that takes us to the madrasa (Islamic educational institution), the mujtahid (qualified Shia religious scholar) and Shia political actors in colonial India. In this landscape the mujtahids or Khandan-i-Ijtihad (family of muftis) of Lucknow is one among many other actors. The authority of the religious class was accentuated by the power of the vernacular Shia press most prolific of which were Matba-i-Jafari and Matba-i-Isna Áshariya. Polemic writers like Abid Ali Rizvi of Wazirganj are as much part of this story as a senior figure like Aga Khan who was dining with Dalits in Delhi for Shia missionary work. This shows that class and caste difference were critical issues to be engaged with for Shia expansion. Shia Islam had to be at least rhetorically differentiated from ashraf (high caste, respectable Muslims) and sayyid (descendents of Muhammad) cultural norms and exclusivity. Shia clerics started defining Shia Islam's relevance for all including low castes (Jones 2012: 65).

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The logic of Shia expansion was not limited to the religious elites but also spread to what Jones terms "marketplace Shiism" (chapter 2). The use of Shia culture was central in this expansion. The domain of majalis (mourning gatherings for Hussain) and Muharram (first month of Muslim calendar marked by commemoration of Imam Husain martyrdom), was crucial in defining and spreading Shia visual and ceremonial symbolism in urban public culture. In this ritualised cultural domain, patronising Muharram juloos (procession), and building imambaras (the edifices in which Muharram is observed) became new sites of displaying religious piety hitherto the domain of nobility. From the court domain these processes now entered muhalla (neighbourhood) quarters. These brought in new marketplace actors like sermonisers and reciters of karbala-stories such as Maqbool Ahmad. This marketplace Shia Islam was also characterized by an innovation in Muharram processions. The rise of chup (silent) processions evolved in the urban communal politics

of the crowded urban towns of united provinces.

Jones argues that these developments were not so much about religious observance but an innovation of disentranced Shia elites to mourn their own post-1857 turbulence. These innovations were bound to create conflict and they arose on issues ranging from control of Karbala ground, the colour of ashura participants' clothes or the singing of objectionable verses. Jones notes that through these innovations "custom was purified in colonial India in order to seek closure from other religious communities as well as a form of self-preservation" (Jones 2012: 104).

Jones argues that innovations were a part of the political strategy of new religious actors to position themselves in the increasingly crowded marketplace Shia Islam. This religious marketplace was characterised by competition resulting in amended azans, new mosques, innovative rituals and cultural activities. It is within this marketplace that Jones locates the role of Anjuman (association) endowments and the making of the "Associational Shiism". By the turn of the twentieth century conferences and welfare institutions emerged claiming to represent the Shia constituency. These developments testified the "discourse of modern Muslim respectability and critique of aristocratic elitism of North India Shiism". This was a significant turn from Shia Islam as a marker of high culture to its entry into its popular counterpart. Jones concentrates on the political outcome of these cultural innovations but these also had diverse literary, visual and emotional effects that reshaped and continue to define Shia Islam in South Asia (Pinault 2000; Hyder 2006).

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Jones is right in his observation that there was a visible shift in the self-representation of Shia Islam from high to popular culture. However, he underestimates the persistence of the declining aristocratic image of Shia Islam. To understand that history one would have to shift the focus from Lucknow of British India to the domain of princely India. In my own doctoral research work on the princely state of Rampur, I examine how Shia Islam was negotiated by the minority Shia Nawabs in a Sunni stronghold town. The scathing print critique of Nawab Hamid Ali Khan's rule (1889-1930) and its comparison with the "decadent Shia court" of Wajid Ali Shah reflects an interesting tension both within the changing discourse about religion, culture and the Shia-Sunni politics of United Provinces. This also reveals to us the inner class tension between the erstwhile landed elites and the new modernist sharif generation that termed the former's culture as decadent while trying to carve out its

own new notion of respectability and reformed culture. This tension was evident even within the Shia community. Moreover, it was reflected in the All India Shia Conference which relied on the monetary support of the Nawabi elites but was also being challenged by the new generation of lawyers and public activists such as Muhammad Hadi (Jones 2012: 124). Jones concludes that Shia Islam in the twentieth century was still struggling its way between tradition and modern associational change.

This was evident in the tension particularly on matters concerning waqfs (religious endowments) and property which often pitted Shias against each other and complicated the meaning of us and the other that ranged from the old versus the new, the Indian Shia versus the wider international Shia Islam, and therefore was not just limited to the issue of Shia-Sunni sectarian binary discourse. The history of the politicisation of Shia and Sunni identity and the rise of sectarian violence is a long one that Jones narrates in the last two chapters. He places the beginning of this separation with the meaning of Aligarh through Shia eyes. David Lelyveld's remarkable work revealed to us the rise of Muslim solidarity in the making of Aligarh and the Aligarh generation (Lelyveld 1978). Jones takes that story forward and reveals that the solidarity did not last long and draws attention to the heavy critique of the institution's sympathy to western education and Sunni dominance (Jones 2012: 155-156).

Interestingly, while the initial critique came from the Shia clergy it was the new but increasingly vocal associational Shia activists who started the movement for an alternative Shia college project. The project brought the old elite who paid for the institution and the ulama (scholars of Islamic knowledge) together, thereby undermining the ideological stability of Aligarh as a symbol of Muslim solidarity. The role played by the British policy is another side to this politicisation process where the Shia College was advanced as a possible alternative to the Young Party's Pan-Islamism activism at Aligarh.

Jones also argues that the Shia response to the issue of Pan-Islamism and rhetoric of Jihad was ambivalent, if not outright hostile. While this further politicised the Shia-Sunni difference, it also created internal tension within the Shia community. This indeed has been the twin effect of politicisation of religion in India under colonial rule, which was more than just a story of solidarity or separatism. Rather the interwar period in India was also marked by the fragmentation of authority and the rise of multiple often divergent positions on issue of self, community and

Islam. This, in some sense, then explains the background to Shia-Sunni conflicts in colonial India. Jones focuses on the final culmination of these conflicts in Lucknow of the 1930s in the form of the Madh-i-Sahaba to Tabarra agitation from 1931-1939. This agitation eventually resulted in greater social segregation and political differentiation in a decade which was also marked by the strengthening of Muslim communal politics (Jones 2012: 220). Jones traces the origin of this agitation in the alterations in the Shia leadership in the 1920s and the rise of the more polemical young scholars and organisations (a process with parallels among Sunni Muslims).

This seems more like an inner-Shia transitional phase that allows us to therefore historicise the history of sectarianism as a complicated issue that does not operate only with the creation of another group (in this case the Sunnis) but also with inner differentiation and consolidation of one strand in a particular transitional period. Sectarianism, therefore, was empowering marginal groups and actors within the seemingly united Muslim community. This long drawn transition allows us to make sense of the shift within Shia Islam from high culture to a popular religion. It also reveals the persistence of the local specificity that marked Lucknow as a centre of Shia religious and political activism even as it got interestingly connected with Shia international Islam through ideas, actors and technologies. The forging of religious identity, community formation, and sectarianism are therefore not unconnected stories. They also form a part of modernity and its trajectories in colonial India and continue to inform and shape the persistence of postcolonial identity politics.

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Jones' work on Shia Islam gives us one of the many 'minority histories' on Muslim identity in colonial India. He reminds us about the limits of and fissures within Muslim solidarity and the layers of identity, actors and institutions that complicate the subject of religion and community. He also provides us with a new framework to understand religious ideas and practices as a deeply contested site of the "marketplace". This issue has been also highlighted by Nile Green in his formulation about "religious economy" in the Indian Ocean that was more pluralistic and competitive (Green 2011). This formulation also allows us to connect 'local' with 'translocal' processes. However, the task still remains to work out and provide more grounded details of local negotiations, particularly beyond the centres of North Indian Islam and to examine the post-1857 centrality of locality. This might provide us with a much sharper focus to

understand how larger issues whether of religious revivalism or political separatism were worked out within the local political and social structures where issues of class, sect, families and other hierarchies defined the limits and possibilities of religious economy.

Jones' work therefore allows us to move beyond and rethink the argument about Muslim solidarity and separatism as a linear narrative that starts from post-1857 Revolt and leads to 1947 Partition. It also shows the multifarious effect of the intellectual vibrancy of South Asian Islam. This issue also seems to be at heart of Ali Usman Qasmi's book *Questioning the Authority of the Past: The Ahl al-Quran Movements in the Punjab.* Qasmi provides an enviable detailed account of the hitherto marginalized study of Ahl al-Quran movements. Qasmi's work examines the limits and possibilities of studying Muslim identity through the lens of Islamic sacred texts at the cost of sacrificing cultural milieu and historical experiences. He suggests new ways of coming out of this binary by highlighting the dynamism of the scriptural sources themselves and demanding recognition for the process of interpretation that shapes the history of Islamic sacred text (Qasmi 2011: 13). He studies Ahl al-Quran movements to understand the contestations rather than the reification of Islamic tradition.

Qasmi's book is an intellectual history of certain religious scholars whom he studies within the rubric of Ahl al-Quran movements. In Qasmi's words the term

> Ahl al-Quran is primarily a referential to a particular intellectual endeavour in the ongoing discourse in Islamic reform which evaluates the contours of Prophet's authority, sceptically looks at the authenticity of his recorded words and persistently seeks revision of the estimated relative statuses of Quran and Hadith vis-à-vis of belief and practice.
> (Qasmi 2011: 19)

However, he also cautions us that categorisation is difficult to sustain in such cases and goes on to carefully show the differences that followed similarities and divergences that parallel convergences in the writings of various Ahl al-Quran scholars. The book introduces us to the prolific work of Maulvi Abdullah Chakralawi and his followers who appropriated and took his legacy in different directions. While the Amritsari version utilised it in promoting the idea of Islamic universalism others like Ghu-

lam Ahmad Parwez brought this into the service of the state of Pakistan. To understand the origin of these divergent interpretations of Quran and its message, we need the historical context in which Islam and Quran were placed in nineteenth century India when such debates about authority of the past became a contentious issue. This intellectual history of Muslim thought therefore takes us to non-Muslim writings on Quran and Prophet in colonial British Empire.

There was one thing that was common in the nineteenth century writings on Islam – an enhanced focus on Muhammad's personhood and life. Emergent maslaks and their rivals were claiming prophetic authority to establish their own credentials, the most important being the Barelwis as well as Ahl-e-Hadith who were consolidating in the Punjab region. But interestingly the beginning of the revision of or turn towards Quran can be found not just in the religious bahas (debate) but also in the colonial print sphere in which Sayyid Ahmad Khan emerges as the major revisionist on Hadith (words and deed transmitted on the authority of Prophet). Sayyid Ahmad Khan has been studied as an iconic Islamic modernist often at the cost of excluding the spectrum of his intellectual output on Islam before he got involved with the Aligarh movement. Qasmi provides us with this other side of the story of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's image as a Munkir-i-Hadith (denier of Hadith) and an ideologue for Ahl al-Quran.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan's intellectual trajectory is studied in detail from his early days of writing a maulud text (Prophet's Biography) to his critical take on the Prophetic tradition. This transition coincided with the rise of writings on the Prophet Muhammad by both Christian missionaries who were active in British India and Oriental scholars like Alois Sprenger who also wrote a less known biography of Prophet in German *Das Leben und die Lehre des Muhammad.* William Muir's biography of the Prophet *Life of Mahomet* generated much controversy for its observations on the Prophet's life. Yet, interestingly both used Hadith as an important source of knowledge and understanding of Islam and Prophetic authority. It is in response to these interpretations that Sayyid Ahmad produced not just a defence but a critique. The critique cantered around the issue of authenticity of the text used as well as a fundamental difference in understanding the Prophetic authority. Sayyid Ahmad came to the conclusion of the non-binding authority of the Prophet, especially that which relied on Hadith. Interestingly, he did so by making an argument about historicity. Thus Hadith or the Prophetic tradition was revised un-

der the rational criterion.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan made an argument about historicity and authenticity to accept correct Prophetic authority. He was of course not alone in this modernist revision. While his views earned him great hostility and the title of Munkir-i-Hadith, he did receive partial support from his disciples and associates that formed in Qasmi's term new "religious corps de elite". These included Altaf Husain Hali, Shibli Numani and other modernists like Sayyid Amir Ali and Maulvi Chiragh Ali all of whom wrote about the Prophet and his tradition and reached different conclusion but nevertheless created what Qasmi terms "neo-mutazilite spirit" Western educated Muslims allowing them to maintain their traditional view while challenging those that ran counter to their modern sensibilities. Qasmi argues that this neo-mutazilite spirit trickled down from the western educated to those who were educated in a traditional way. These formed the subsequent actors of Ahl al-Quran. This formulation fails to question the categories of 'modernist' and 'traditional' that are assumed as already well-defined. Furthermore, Qasmi also does not complicate the relationship of colonial and modern. In this narrative Sayyid Ahmad Khan remains 'modernist' while also branching out as neo-mutazilite. However, it seems to me that without taking colonial modernity and its effects on Muslim intelligentsia into account, we cannot adequately complicate the issue of Islamic Modernism and Muslim intellectual thought in colonial India (Devji 2007).

Notwithstanding this issue, Qasmi provides us with a meticulous discussion of intellectual thought, actors, and institutions in Punjab. Qasmi maps the interesting religious landscape of Punjab where thanks to both enhanced colonial and missionary presence, a whole range of religious actors were making new claims of authenticity and historicity of religious texts and authority. This claim forms the backdrop for religious controversy in Punjab and the sensational conversion cases and polemical writings. One of the important issues in these religious controversies was religion and sexuality. Swami Dayanand (founder of Arya Samaj) condemned the Quran as a text of sexual promiscuity and moral laxities while Muslim critics cited crass sexuality as depicted in the Vedas and Daynand's idea of Niyoga (levirate) as immoral sexual practice. These debates reached a new height under the polemical writings of Arya Samaji publicist Lekh Ram and the controversy about religious conversion and the writings of Ghazi Mahmud Dharmpal.

Qasmi locates the Ahl al-Quran movement in the context of religious

reform movements in Punjab. Dayanand's Arya Samaj movement championed the case of Vedic texts as the core of the reformed Hinduism. Similar efforts for centralising the religious authority of Sikhism through texts was at work in the efforts of Gurmukh Singh and others in their search for authentic Sikh religious texts and biographies of Guru Nanak (Qasmi 2011: 119). Qasmi observes that this was indicative of a larger process of narrowing down the scriptural basis of religion to a credible text – Veda or Adi Granth – that could be presented in a rational, historical, authentic and therefore universalistic paradigm (Ibid.: 125).

Similar concerns seem to have also shaped Abdullah Chakralawi's scriptural understanding of Islam along with the critical appraisal of the authority of the Prophet by invoking the authority of the original text from God. This was a turn towards what Qasmi calls a "New Prophetology" propounded by Maulvi Abdullah Chakralawi in Punjab. He subsequently went as far as to suggest a reformed Qurani Namaz in his writings. The historiographical and theological position of the "Quran Only" approach was therefore the hallmark of this understanding. He did not only write but also tried to set up an organisational basis in Lahore to promote this idea which was subsequently taken up by Maulwi Hashmat Ali Khan Lahuri who tried to take over, albeit unsuccessfully, the Siriyan Wala Bazar mosque at Lahore. Other minor groups claiming such authority were led by Mistri Muhammad Ramazan in Gujranwala and Muhammad-ud-Din Gujrati in Amritsar. These groups looked for a middle ground or an alternative to understanding the Quran and Hadith as sources of religious authority.

However, the most critical and successful of these projects was the concept of "Islamic universalism" propounded by Khwaja Ahmad-ud-Din Amritsari. In his conception Hadith had to be rejected not so much to assert the supremacy of the Quran per se but for the former's objectionable content and the need to accord the status of divinity to the Quran alone (Qasmi 2011: 167). His was an effort to take the Quran out of Arab centricity and promote an idea of Islamic universalism that could bridge sectarian differences. He also questioned exaggerated reverence of the Prophet and emphasised God's final authority mediated through the Quran. His was an approach that formed the backdrop to similar ideas on Islamic universalism by Abdul Kalam Azad, Iqbal, and Allama Mashriqi among others. An interesting spin to this was given by Aslam Jayrajpuri in the defence of binding Prophetic tradition by discussing Sunnat-i-Mutwatir and its distinction from spurious Hadith literature.

However, Sunnat-i-Mutawir was defined as a tradition or Sunnat of the Prophet that was practiced by such a sizable section of the population over a long period of time that it could not qualify to be untrue. Nevertheless, Jayrajpuri seems to be in agreement with the critics on the centrality of authenticity and historicity of the source for its validity, rather than just on the basis of a religious tradition. This paved the way for a critical reappraisal of past scholarship and the rise of new critics of Hadith literature.

This long genealogy of critique formed the background to the debates about the validity of Islamic religious authority in the early years of the Pakistani state. In the new space and vision of a Muslim homeland, Pakistan's early history reveals a fascinating politics of Islam and its contesting visions; from the strategic secularism of Jinnah to Islamic leviathan of Maududi with a range of other possibilities in between. Qasmi introduces one such vision and thought of Ghulam Ahmad Parwez who proposed the idea of Markaz-i-Millat or Islamic state based on the authority of the Quran and divine guidance (Qasmi 2011: 234). Qasmi argues that Parwez also laid great emphasis on individual human action and scope for the use of rational faculties in both man-god relationship and, by extension, subject-state relations that accommodated human action even while being divinely guided (Ibid.: 235).

This was one of the many visions that were used or rather abused in the period of intense political turmoil and military dictatorship of the nascent Pakistani nation state. Qasmi tells us in detail the many experiments that happened during the early decades of Pakistan where apart from the religious elite, a new class of power elites were also imagining a new vision of the state under Islamic modernism (Qasmi 2011: 241). This was of course an uneasy resolution and kept shifting from the 1949 Objectives Resolution in favour of an Islamic state to its reappraisal in the *Munir Report* on the meaning and role of Islam and Muslim identity. Efforts to institutionalise Islamic modernism were also made at the Institute for the Reconstruction of Islam of Punjab, Iqbal Academy, and the Institute for Islamic Culture. The quest by military dictators for political legitimacy was matched by flirting with Islamic authority and the failed project of institutionalised liberalism under Dr. Fazlur Rahman (Ibid.: 258) and Ayub Khan's strategic use of Ghulam Parwez authority in the 1960s. This entanglement of political authority with the authority of religious texts and actors remains an unresolved question in the post-colonial trajectory of the Pakistani state and society. Qasmi con-

cludes by emphasising the continuing debate about Hadith and religious authority in contemporary Pakistan.

Through his detailed investigation of the Ahl al-Quran movements Qasmi shows that religious texts have an afterlife from the moment of their inception and that renders the premise of a stable, textually derived understanding of Islam an untenable one. This is an important advancement. For long, the issues of diversity and change were thought to only be traceable in 'lived Islam' while religious texts were seen as unchanging and untouched by effect of colonialism and modernity. Qasmi's work shows how the colonial context (itself shaped by technologies of print and steam) facilitated the flourishing of inter-religious polemic. Christian missionaries, Orientalist scholars, Arya Samaji activists, maulanas, and colonial officials and their policy get entangled in these other histories. The larger and perhaps the more important part of this history is how colonialism and modernism's insistence on historicity and authenticity of a key text for religion became a hallmark of such intellectual projects.

Therefore, we are not just dealing with a Muslim religious public sphere of maulanas but rather with contesting spheres deeply connected with the larger formation of the colonial public sphere and its discourse and policies about communities and texts. As other works have shown, this was not just the case with Islam but was a critical factor in shaping Sikhism and Arya Samaj in colonial India. Religious discourse and intellectual history is here recovered as a much more complicated and contested site with no resolutions reached. These 'other histories' are polemical in nature and embedded within a shared context. These are also not just textual intellectual histories of Muslim thought. By showing how texts become the site and the tool of political mobilisation, Qasmi shows us another complicated relation between the sacred and the profane in colonial and post-colonial South Asia.

Both Jones' and Qasmi's books provide us with complex historical contexts to understand the issues of Muslim identity politics in colonial India and its continuing legacy in post-colonial India and Pakistan. This is a welcome change where historians do not end their research analysis in 1947 with the end of the British colonial rule. The legacy of the past persists but is also renegotiated in contemporary times. This other side of the story – is that of lived experience and informs the next two books under review. The first one talks about the life and politics inside a madrasa and the other about everyday experience of shared religion

in contemporary Indian town.

The first is Arshad Alam's book *Inside a Madrasa: Knowledge, Power and Islamic Identity in India.* It pushes the boundary of existing scholarship on madrasas as a religious institution to a much more complex question of knowledge and power in the production of Islamic identity and a Muslim subject. Alam's usage of Bourdieu's concept of habitus and capital both in the economic and the cultural sense allows him to analyse the madrasa as a site where more than the issue of deen (religion) is debated. The madrasa emerges also as a site of duniya (material) and politics of everyday kind where issues of caste, class, region, language, and social mobility, among other factors, shape outcomes. Alam's case study is the now much renowned madrasa of Mubarakpur. He takes us through a detailed discussion of its history driven with masalik (interpretative community) politics and rivalry. What is more interesting is his discussion on knowledge, power and making of a madrasa regime. He shows that the regime is not a hegemonic power and is contested in everyday form, albeit not violated openly. Let us therefore dwell a little more on the core of the work which is about education and knowledge politics.

Alam distances himself from discourses on the madrasa that have either viewed it as being limited to its role as an institution in spreading Islam or as a site of fundamentalism and terrorism. In the case of India it has been seen as a symbol of a 'backward minority'. Alam suggests that madrasas and their adherents are "not outside history" and goes on to critique the exclusive emphasis on the texts and authors at the expense of their contexts and readers (Alam 2011: 9). His is a study that aims to map the changes that occur in these seemingly unchanging sites. He argues that the madrasa as a religious, social and educational institution experiences changes and what we find now is the "new madrasa" that emerged in colonial and post-colonial context and is qualitatively different from the pre-modern madrasa in terms of its structure, method and the role it plays. This historical transformation should be understood and Alam approaches this transformation through emphasis on Islamic reformism. More interestingly, he also shows us that the madrasa is not just a religious institution and we need to locate it in "conjunction with authority patterns of the local society" to understand its role in society (Ibid.: 19). Alam studies the role of the biggest barelwis madrasa in Mubarakpur in Eastern Uttar Pradesh that is also a centre of others maslaki madrasas. Alam ponders on the key question

whether madrasas play an integrating role or differentiating role in the realm of the religious and social in contemporary India?

Alam begins his answer with the recovering of Mubarakapur's 'other histories' beyond the labels of "Muslim area" or "Mini Pakistan". Notwithstanding its Islamic symbolism, Mubarakpur's history has been as much shaped by the Sharqi kingdom when it was called "shiraz of the east" as by British colonialism. Under colonial rule and economy it became a textile loom town. Mubarakpur is in some ways a town principally populated by weavers but further divided across various muhallas. This town with its multiple pasts and diverse present realities is where the madrasa Ashrafiya evolved. In contrast to other madrasas such as that of the Ahl-e hadis, madrasa Ashrafiya owes its origin to a maktab (writing school) set up by Muhammad Siddique in 1906. Its history is marked by splits before it acquired its present fame as the foremost Barelwi madrasa. It has a history marked by doctrinal as well as personal differences. Class and caste logic shaped it as much as finer arguments about religious texts. Mubarakpur therefore emerges as an arena of competing religiosities (Alam 2011: 66) as well as competing social and religious nobilities. With the changing fortunes of its adherents, Maktab Misbahul Ulum moved from its humble origin and location to acquire a new name madrasa Ashrafiya Misbahul Ulum and even a grand new building.

Behind the façade of the grand building also lies the history of what Alam calls "Institutionalizing Authentic Islam" (Alam 2011: 80). This history reveals the deep caveat that occurred between the Sayyid (descendent of Muhammad) and Ansari (low caste Muslim weaver) communities. Interestingly, the Ansaris through solidarity based on class and caste managed to have a larger say in the religious institution. The issue continued to plague the subsequent debate on appointment and policy of the madrasa Ashrafiya. This is also evident in the constitution of Ashrafiya that mirrors a modern institution in separation of power and checks and balances. It also lays efforts to incorporate worldly subjects along with religious education (Ibid.: 94).

Furthermore the madrasa Ashrafiya also tries to work out caste and class matters to make a larger appeal and extend its constituency beyond Ansaris. The insistence on Barelwi thought and debate about Sayyid leadership possessed enough cultural and social capital to transform this madrasa into an "Arabic university" (Ibid.: 101). This social capital is also evident in the effort to branch into mainstream education

particularly girls' education, in which this madrasa plays a major role, as well as developing local networks of madrasas in other localities. Thus, straddling inner conflicts and splits on the one hand and a integration and expansion on the other hand, the evolution of a maktab into a possible universityreveals no static backwardness but rather creativity and adaptability of the madrasa as a religious, social and educational institution.

The expansion of the madrasa Ashrafiya is explained by looking at the financially adherent constituency of the institution. Alam argues that by adopting popular financing over selective patronage madrasas made a great leap both financially as well as strategically as it brought them into close contact with the Muslim community and individuals (Alam 2011: 112). It also allowed madrasas to remain outside state financial control. The apparatus of this financial organisation includes raising money through committees, processions and speeches. The major source remains Zakat money meant for charity. The charitable constituency of madrasa Ashrafiya also expanded both in size and reach: it now connects Mubarakpur with small but many donors from Bombay and Bhiwandi and with donors with Gulf money remittances. Religious donations have been transformed from an act of charity to a marker of social status (Ibid.: 127). While the madrasa Ashrafiya has benefitted from such increase, it has also opened greater competition with rival maslaks like the Deobandi that apparently seem to flourish on foreign funds. However, the Gulf is no longer the centre of Islamic charity and the arena is now open to transnational connections through graduates and adherents of madrasas and maslaks in Europe, America and Africa. This spectacular rise in global financial powers partly explains the religious success of madrasas. The madrasa here is an effective agent of both religious and secular powers based on the organisation and management of resources.

The generous donor is only one side of the story; the other is the stark reality of Muslims' lack of access to employment and education. This story takes us to the Indian hinterland of Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, among others, which is where the students of these madrasas are drawn from. Religious zeal is only one of the many reasons behind joining madrasa education. Based on government records and personal interviews Alam tries to understand how and why this area has become the nursery of madrasa education. Dominated by pasmanda Muslims (low class/caste) with limited or no access to employment and

education, madrasas offer the option of education which the 'secular' government has failed to provide. Alam shows a range of economic, religious and cultural reasons that inform the choice made by families from different strata of society to educate their children in madrasas.

These children are not invisible subjects and have a history and agency of their own. While dealing with their early displacement from the home to the madrasa, they learn to inculcate norms of what Alam calls the "madrasa regime". This is often an everyday form of learning meant to lead to ethical behaviour and personal transformation but it is coerced and involves violence and strict bodily and everyday discipline. As other scholars have pointed out this is also an extremely gendered process (Winkelmann 2005) of creating obedient subjects by disciplining everyday mannerisms of body, cloth, speech and behaviour. However, strict behaviour is subverted with moments of fun and pleasure. The chai dhabas (tea shops) or the cricket ground are as much a part of this disciplined madrasa life as memorizing Islamic texts are and it will be wrong to dismiss the life of madrasa student as a life devoid of any joy. Madrasa habitus provides us with an interesting site to understand the construction of norms of masculinity, femininity and shifting meaning of obedience and subversion in Muslim cultures of South Asia.

What then is the role and effect of a madrasa in a Muslim life and Muslim area? Madrasas serve a whole range of secular and religious roles. It is difficult to reach an easy analysis of them being the agents of Muslim orthodoxy and solidarity. As Alam shows, madrasas and their subjects reflect ever increasing fragmentation of authority within the Muslim community. The religious discourse and practices of madrasas often operate through inter-maslak condemnation as the 'Enemy Within' and if they at all create or reproduce an identity, it is not that of a united Muslim umma but one of a distinct maslak. This in some ways reflects the other side of Islamic reform and revivalism, far from being an agent of cohesion they have triggered and increased contestations. Alam convincingly shows us that the madrasa is an important site to study these diverse contestations and not just a regime of disciplined Muslim subject formation.

These everyday forms of negotiations and contestation also form the core of a brilliant debut book by Anna Bigelow in 2010 entitled *Sharing the Sacred: Practicing Pluralism in Muslim North India.* She focuses on the historical and contemporary aspect of intra- and inter-communal relationships in Malerkotla – the only Muslim majority town in post parti-

tion Indian Punjab. In doing so she provides us with fascinating insights into the reworking of the past in the present. She points at the creative construction of a "Moral Past" that provides a frame of peace and helps the practising of strategic and shifting shared pluralism. This is visible in shared spaces, civic and sacred. She focuses on practises of pluralism at the shrine of a Sufi saint Haider Shaykh in Malerkotla. The shrine carries importance in Malerkotla's history with its past as a Muslim ruled area but is also supported by the blessing of Sikh Guru Gobind Singh and managed to escape the violence of partition and maintain peace in contemporary times. This "Moral Past" is remembered both in narration and practised in public rituals providing a shared frame to maintain peace. However, Bigelow's concern is not to canonise Malerkotla as an "Island of Peace" or as a story of exceptionalism. She instead attempts to see the politics of past and present, of memories remembered and forgotten, and the centrality of the past in the making of present. As Bigelow puts it "[t]he critical issue therefore is not the existence of non-existence of violent histories but how histories conducive to coalition building and civic harmony come to dominate the public and private sphere" (Bigelow 2010: 18).

Yet, Bigelow's argument that sharing of sacred space and pietistic traditions has been an unexplored issue is not quite correct. It seems pluralism in South Asia has become synonymous only with the study of shared sites of Sufism and "folk Islam". This limits our enquiry into the shared and everyday connected civic life and privileges the sacred and separates it from the realm of the civic (Gottschalk 2000). Bigelow on the other hand does explore the connections between sacred and everyday civic life and argues that "an examination of effective interactive practices at shared sites, therefore, will illuminate modes, system and strategies of exchange that substantively contribute to the production and perpetuation of peace" (Bigelow 2010: 21). Bigelow is also aware of the limits of tolerance of sharing that is achieved in such sites and therefore agrees that "no single factor can or should be isolated as the key element of a stable society without which the delicate balance of exchange would collapse" (Ibid.: 26). It is indeed the combination of social, political, and institutional will, along with integrated civil social institutions, everyday interaction and integration, religious tradition and powerful motivating ideals that is activated by the existence and maintenance of a dominant symbolic identity and ideology in Malerkotla. This element of multivocality of both the shrine and the town serve as

powerful resources for community building and promotion of harmonious civil society (Ibid.: 28).

This informs the framework of Bigelow's study on the functioning of the multi-religious communities and their "strategies of cohabitation" in dealing with the history of interreligious conflicts (Bigelow 2010: 31). In the case of Malerkotla, the legacy of the Sufi saint Shaykh Sadruddin Sadri Jahan and the role of the Tomb of Haider Shaykh are quite crucial and inform chapter 1 and 5. These chapters show how Malerkotla is remembered and understood as Sufi wilayat (spiritual territory) under the protection of the Shaykh. This invocation creates a shifting moral past where the role of the Shaykh as founder, integrator, protector and a moral example allows the creation of collective memory (Ibid.: 36). This might not be historically accurate but derives its strength and importance from an "efficiency born out of repetition" (Ibid.: 46). The invocation of the moral life and past of Shaykh Haider's wilayat is identified as egalitarian, sanjhi or common (Ibid.: 54). Bigelow opines that "these narrative tradition about Haider Shaikh's exemplary life and values provides a structure through which a wide range of opinions, ethical values and personal agendas are expressed with authority and enormous creativity" (Ibid.: 58).

Similarly, through shared rituals and practices at the tomb of Haider Shaykh, the Dargah emerges as a symbolic centre of the multi-religious constituency of present day Malerkotla. The shrine provides a common ground for the articulation of shared beliefs and practice that includes the ritual of pilgrimage, procession and healing, the shared act of cooking and cleaning at the shrine and shared celebrations. Bigelow observes that "these commemorative activities generate a community of memory and a ritualized pattern of harmony, regularly establishing and revitalizing the resources of the past to serve the interest of the present" (Ibid.: 194).

This is also the case in remembering the role of the Nawabs of Malerkotla during colonialism, partition, and post-colonial periods which is elaborated in chapters 2, 3, 4. Apart from the shared sacred memory and practices that the shrine of Hyder Shaykh provides, the legacy of Muslim rule is another important resource of the past that is shared. Bigelow explores this strategic invocation of past, particularly the incident of Nawab Sher Mohammed Khan's defence of two Sikh sahibzadas of Sikh Guru against the violence of Mughal ruler and the subsequent blessing of the Guru for Malerkotla which now forms a part of the Haah da Naar legend. The legend has a different history in various invocations

but all these shifting narratives nevertheless use this resource of the past to define the shared history and future of the people of Malerkotla. Not only is therefore the city blessed by the Shaykh, it also has the blessing of the Guru.

However, spiritual blessings are never enough to maintain peace in worldly matters. As Bigelow goes on to show, Malerkotla did experience inter-communal tensions and violence. Bigelow goes on to reveal the presence of not only Hindu-Muslim but also Shia-Sunni tensions in Malerkotla. The presence of dispute over Katha-Arati-Namaz was a communal issue that Malerkotla also experienced under colonialism (Bigelow 2010: 108). Bigelow insists that the important thing was not the presence of such conflicts but how they were resolved by the communities involved (Ibid.: 115). Also important is how these histories of conflicts are remembered and forgotten in collective memories. Bigelow postulates that in Malerkotla a strategic invocation of "useful elements of Malerkotla past" is invoked, these include the blessing of the Shaykh and the Guru that sustained peace in time of conflict and most spectacularly kept Malerkotla from Partition violence (Ibid.: 121). This involves the neglect of histories that are potentially inflammatory in favour of the invocation of moments of harmony and shared past. The Partition experience therefore finds place in invocation of this past. The peace maintained at the time of Partition is explained through both material factors like the good role played by the rulers and subjects of Malerkotla as well as the spiritual effect of the blessing of the Sufi saint Haider Shaykh and of Guru Gobind Singh who had blessed the place with peace.

Bigelow observes that these narratives of peace and harmony are means of building cohesion among the fragmented people in post-Partition Punjab. But while remembering Partition is important, it is also required that we understand how communities move over histories of violence through forgetting. In Malerkotla the creation of collective memories is a cortical component of dealing with tensions of the past. In contemporary times, apart from invoking a shared past, residents of Malerkotla also make efforts to ensure a shared present through peace committees, civic groups and organisations but also in everyday life with shared public rituals and practices. However, as Bigelow suggests civic associational cooperation needs to be matched by vibrant community life. This requires a spectrum of links that "binds communities publicly, politically, economically, spiritually and personally" (Bigelow 2010: 224). Bigelow's work therefore allows us to rethink the issue of

inter religious relations in South Asia beyond the binary of pre-colonial composite or colonial communal past. It showcases the limits and possibilities of peaceful co-existence which is not given but is reworked on an everyday basis in post-partition South Asia.

Both Alam and Bigelow are able to capture the everyday negotiations with the religious and the worldly in a 'Muslim institution' and 'Muslim city'. The use of anthropological observation is indeed more useful to recover 'lived Islam'. However, it is interesting that both these work also engage with the role of history in the making of the present. Alam's work on the institution of the madrasa is informed by the historical evolution of Mubarakapur and its class and caste setup. He is also able to delineate the colonial impact in the transformation of a madrasa. Similarly, Bigelow is able to make sense of contemporary inter-communal relationship by critically exploring the strategic usage of pasts. Both works also share a much clearer focus on locality and complicate the easy generalizations about 'Muslim areas'.

The task is not just to talk about other histories of hitherto unexamined sects, maslaks, texts and authors as new additions to existing work on Islam in South Asia. New writings on the subject need to move out of the easy comfort zone of entering histories of Muslim in South Asia through the lens of Islam. The books reviewed here still operate through a history of Islamic institutions, texts and traditions in South Asian Islam. While this allows us to reconsider existing meanings of sectarianism, maslak, madrasa and religiousity, what we also require is scholarship that critically explores the politics of constructing the Muslimness of culture, language, texts, spaces and selves (Zamindar 2007; Sarkar 2008; Mir 2010). Such an inquiry reveals the politics of religion and culture in colonial and post-colonial South Asia. The historical and sociological recovery of lived Islam should not be restricted to finding diversity but should also recognise the entangled identifications of Muslims in South Asia (Metcalf 2009). Thinking beyond the logic of identity politics we also need to re-locate the process through which the Muslim subject is produced through class, gender, literary and spatial politics. We need new critical histories and sociologies of Muslims in South Asia that re-locate the relationships amongst self, community and state. Such a recovery of the other 'minority pasts' can only come once we begin to debate new ways of reading and writing about Muslims in South Asia.

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