

The Discourses Analysis of the Arab Conquest of Sindh

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Abstract

The fall of Sindh in 712 is described as a great conquest in the textbooks of Pakistan. For Pakistani state, Mohammad Bin Qasim is a national hero who made Sindh, the Bab-ul-Islam (the door of Islam). However, for the Sindhi nationalists Muhammad Bin Qasim was an invader and Raja Dahir is a national hero of Sindh, who fought and sacrificed his life to defend his motherland. In Sindh a new discourse is emerging as well which claims to fight for the rights of the Dalit community in Sindh. The claimants of Dalit discourse, say not only Mohammad Bin Qasim was usurper and foreign invader but also Brahmin Hindu, Raja Dahir was a son of a usurper, Chach who had dethroned the Dalit ruler of Sindh, Rai Sahasi II by conspiracy and deceit. In this paper an attempt is made to explore how a single historical event, the conquest of Sindh in 712, is used to construct three different discourses and corresponding three identities the Pakistani, Sindhi and Dalit. It is interesting to observe how history casts its shadow on the present, while present tries to construct the 'reality' in the past. The basic purpose of this research would be to understand the politics behind three contrasting discourses rather than proving the superiority or veracity of one discourse over the others.

Keywords: History of Medieval India; Political Islam; History of Sindh; Sindhi Nationalism; Sindhi Dalits.

1. Introduction

The Social Constructionist paradigm claims that reality is not objective and fixed rather it is subjective, socially constructed and ever-changing. On the same account social constructivists claim that “conflict is a socially constructed cultural event” and that “people are active participants in creating situations and interactions they experience” (Lederach, 1996, p. 9). The social constructivist idea that conflict is a socially constructed cultural event implies the salient features, positions and basis of conflict are constructed by the people by giving a new meaning and interpretation to some actions and events.

Hence, historical events and meaning attached to them by certain individuals and groups becomes important in the context of living conflicts between communities. Social constructivism conceives the “primacy of the social process” and argues that “people act on the basis of the meaning things have for them and that meaning is created through shared and accumulated

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knowledge” (ibid, p. 10). The theory of social constructivism helps us to understand and analyse the motivations and political goals of people behind the new meaning they attach to the historical events.

Like Mohammad Bin Qasim’s attack on Sindh in 712 is an event in the remote past but the meaning attached to it has relevance in present for different communities. In May 2020 twitter had become a new battlefield between the supporters of Mohammad Bin Qasim (MBQ) and Raja Dahir. On May 04, 2020 the hashtag #MohammadBinQasimRealHero was one of the top trends in Pakistan and the very next day the hashtag #RajaDahirIsNationalHero trended as one of the top trends in Pakistan. This shows all those who discuss this event and provide a new meaning to it must have their political motivation for which they wanted to construct a different reality for themselves and for their communities.

Different groups in the Indian Sub-continent have seen the Arab conquest of Sindh in 712 through different lenses. This debate has been divided along the national lines since the partition of India in 1947. The Indian text books described it as the ‘Arab invasion of Sind’ (Verghese, 2008), while Pakistani textbooks eulogised the heroics of Arab commander, Mohammad Bin Qasim (MBQ) and started the history of Pakistan from the ‘Arab conquest of Sind’ in 712 (Nayyar, 2005). Later, G.M. Sayed, the famous Sindhi nationalist leader added the Sindhi nationalist discourse to this academic debate and made Raja Dahir, the hero of Sindh in his famous book, *Sindh ja Soorma* meaning ‘the heroes of Sindh’ published in 1974.

There are three different discourses about the Arab invasion of Sindh which are explored in this paper. The first discourse is the Pakistani nationalist discourse that describes Mohammad Bin Qasim (MBQ) as a national hero of Pakistan. This discourse has been spread through textbooks taught at different levels in Pakistani schools and colleges and through several history books written with the state approval. The second discourse is developed by the Sindhi nationalist leader, G.M. Syed in his books and articles and through his political programme which describes Raja Dahir as a national hero of Sindh and MBQ as the usurper and invader. Recently, a new ‘Dalit discourse’ has also emerged in Sindh who see both Raja Dahir and Mohammad Bin Qasim as anti-people forces especially they consider the Brahmin period starting with Chach and culminating at Raja Dahir as the most ruthless and tyrannical rule because they suppressed specially the lower casts which they term as the Dalit community of Sindh.

The goal of this paper is not to prove or disapprove certain discourse vis-à-vis the other rather an attempt is made to study all three discourses dispassionately. All three above mentioned discourses are studied in the light of social constructionist school of thought to understand the motivations and political goals of its proponents. The paper explains why this event of 712 AD is still so dear and important for the individuals and groups of people in contemporary politics.

2. Research Question

The main research question of this research is to explore how same historical event, the conquest of Sindh in 712 is used to construct three different discourses and corresponding three identities the Pakistani, Sindhi and Dalit by their proponents, how history (an event in 712) casts its shadow on the present, and how people construct the 'reality' in the past to achieve their political ends?

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative research methods are used for data collection and data analysis of this research paper. As this research falls within the Social Constructionist paradigm, therefore, the choice of qualitative methods was obvious. This is basically a desk research as most of the data used in this research consists of books, research articles, newspaper articles written on the three discourses, however, some informal qualitative interviews of Dalit leaders are conducted to elicit information about the Dalit discourse.

4. Review of Literature:

As the study focuses on three different discourses about the Arab Conquest of Sindh, so to maintain the balance, literature relating to all three discourses is used in this study. Most of the literature produced on topic was biased which supported one or other discourse, however, a more balanced view is also provided in some of the recent literature on the topic. Among those authors who supported the Pakistani state discourse portraying Mohammad Bin Qasim as a hero are (Ahmed, 1958; Qureshi, 1962; Siddiqi, 1969; Anver, 1979; Quddus, 1992; Haroon, 2004; Kazimi, 2007; Javed, 2010) are only a few to name here.

On contrary to the state discourse, Sindhi nationalist leader, G.M. Syed singlehandedly constructed a new discourse directly opposite to the state discourse labelling Mohammad Bin Qasim (MBQ) an invader, looter and plunderer while portraying Raja Dahir as the defender, a patriot and a hero of Sindh (Siddhiqui, 2012). G.M. Sayed developed his separatist Sindhi nationalist discourse describing the events of 712 in Sindhi nationalist perspective in his books *Sindh ja Soorma* (Syed, 1974), *Sindhu desh: A Study In Its Separate Identity Through The Ages* (Sayed), *The Case of Sindh* (Sayed) and *A Nation in Chains-Sindhudesh* (Syed, 1974). G.M. Sayed could not muster enough mass political support for his political party *Jiye Sindh* to outshine more populist Sindhi leader *Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto*, nonetheless, his nationalist discourse is one of the most powerful discourse among native Sindhi community.

Apart from this extremely partisan literature which describes history in terms of heroes and villains, there is some more balanced and non-partisan literature available as well. The non-partisan literature includes the works of (Bede, 1973; Ali, 1994; Engineer, 2002; Asif, 2016). Mr. Manan Ahmed Asif did his PhD dissertation on the topic, the many histories of Muhammad bin

Qasim: Narrating the Muslim conquest of Sindh in 2008 from the University of Chicago, USA trying to situate the Arab conquest of Sindh outside of the nationalist/post-colonial paradigms which was later published as a book, *A Book of Conquest: The Chachnama and Muslim Origins in South Asia* by the Harvard University Press in 2016. In his book Mannan has challenged the origin thesis attached with the Arab conquest and questioned often taken for granted and normative understanding of Muslims as “outsiders” and “invaders” in India.

As for as the Dalit discourse on conquest of Sindh in 712 is concerned, it is still very fresh and raw, this has recently emerged from the platform of the newly launched political party, Dalit Suggag Tahrik (DST) which has its base mostly among the lower caste Hindus in the Southern districts of Sindh province along with some of the Muslim political and social activists. The DST has very strong women presence among its leadership and members. Introducing DST, one of its founding members and a guiding spirit behind DST, Mr. Ghulam Hussain Mahesar told the authors,

DST is the Dalit-driven social and political forum. It was established to inculcate political consciousness among the Scheduled castes and other oppressed sections of society including women and marginalized communities among Muslims such as the people among fisher folks. DST, and most of Dalit forums or movements, are not merely caste specific but also gender sensitive, and brings into consideration class dynamics following the notion of graded intersectionality (Mahesar 2018).

So far, very little academic literature has been produced specifically from the Dalit point of view on this topic. Ghulam Hussain himself wrote three research articles mostly explaining the denial of caste (Dalitness) in Sindh, Pakistan and explaining how Dalits of Sindh are hegemonized and exploited in the name of Sindhi nationalism and political Islam (Hussain, 2019, pp. 1-30). Nevertheless, the point of view on Arab conquest that Dalits in Sindh derive is inspired from Abdullah (2009) who asks for looking at the history of Sindh from the people’s perspective and provides more in-depth analysis of the events specially drawing attention to the Budhist-Brahmin differences that existed at that time in Sindh. Drawing inspiration from this DST leader Ganpat Rai wrote in local Sindhi newspaper, Sindh Express that historians of Sindh should not restrict themselves to the debate along Raja Dahir- Mohammad Bin Qasim but also need to look who was ruling Sindh before Raja Dahir, how Brahmins had dethroned the Buddhist rulers of Sindh and how Brahmins treated the people of Sindh (Rai, unpublished works). For understanding the Dalit discourse some informal interviews with DST leaders were also conducted to comprehend their point of view on the topic.

5. The Pakistani State Discourse

According to the Pakistani nationalist discourse and the state narrative, it was not just Arab conquest rather a Muslim triumph. The proponents of this discourse claim it was the Arab conquest of Sindh which opened the gates of India for Islam which is why Sindh has been described as Bab-ul-Islam, the door of Islam. Mannan Ahmed Asif wrote after the debacle of East Pakistan in 1971, Jamaat-i-Islami became the chief organizers of Yaum-i- Bab-ul-Islam (Door of Islam Day) in Karachi to commemorate the MBQ's conquest of Sindh every year on 10th of Ramazan and started journals and magazines devoted to show the connections between Pakistan and Arabia (Asif 2016, p. 178).

The proponents of the state narrative (Ikram, 1964; Ahmed, 1964; Qureshi, 1962) connected MBQ's conquest of Sindh with victories of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi, Shahabuddin Ghauri, Qutubuddin Aibak and the other Muslim rulers of slave dynasty and the Mughal empire of India to create a Muslim civilization link and construct a separate identity for the Muslims of India. Brigadier (Retired) Asif Haroon in his book even connects the victory of young Muslim commander, Mohammad Bin Qasim against the 'Hindu Maharaja', Raja Dahir to the coup of General Parvez Musharraf in 1999 against 'corrupt' civilian leader Nawaz Sharif in Pakistan.

This theory of civilizational link between Arabs, Slave Kings of India and Mughals who ruled India in different times and at times fought among themselves, merely on grounds of their religious identity is rejected by many historians like Romila Thapar, Richard Eaton and Mubarak Ali. Stanley Lane-Poole also described the Arab conquest as an episode in the history of India and of Islam—a triumph without results because it affected only a small portion of the vast country of India as Arabs could not enhance their influence beyond Multan (Poole, 2007).

Pakistan was created in the name of Islam as the demand for Pakistan was based on the two-nation theory which meant Hindus and Muslims constituted the two nations in united India. Moreover, because of the Kashmir conflict, enmity with India became a corner stone of Pakistan's foreign policy right from the birth of the new nation. Therefore, it was considered unsuitable to include all phases of the Indian history in the syllabus of Pakistani textbooks. The textbooks in Pakistan mostly would mention the ancient Indus civilization of the Mohen-jo-Daro and Harappa and then directly jump to the medieval period, the Arab conquest of Sindh in 712 AD.

The Arab conquest of Sindh has a special significance for the historiography in Pakistan because it helps construct the historical roots for Pakistani nationalism based on Muslim conquests in India. When General Zia-ul-Haq introduced Pakistan Studies as a compulsory subject from class ninth to the graduation in 1980, in all textbooks the history of Pakistan started from 712 AD, the year MBQ conquered Sindh. Dr. Jaffar Ahmed says, "the adoption of this event as the starting point of Pakistan history signifies its political bias" (Ahmed, p. 328).

Asghar Ali Engineer negates this with historical evidence that Islam had entered in South Asia with the annexation of Sindh and claims Islam entered Southern India almost in the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (Engineer 2002). He writes the Arabs used to travel to Kerala on the West Coast for trade even in Pre-Islamic days and some of them settled in Kerala and married the local women in Kerala. After the advent of Islam, they became Muslim and Muslim Sufi saints also used to visit Kerala and converted many with their preaching in Kerala region. He mentions as a proof that the region called Malabar in Kerala is Indianised version of *ma bar* which in Arabic means “passage” (ibid, p. 71). This fact can also be verified by the fact that Kerala is still one of the states with largest Muslim population in India and perhaps the only state in India which is free from communal riots despite possessing Muslim population in a big number. On the other hand, Richard Eaton questions if that was the case then Muslim majority areas should have been in the central India around Delhi as this area was under the direct control of the Muslim rulers and not around the outskirts of India which now constitute the parts of Pakistan and Bangladesh (Eaton & Eaton, 1993).

In Pakistani text books Qasim’s bravery, administration and rule are eulogised while Mughal rulers in general and especially Akbar’s efforts for accommodating the majority Hindu community in India are criticised. In textbooks Mughal emperor, Akbar’s rule is either omitted or mentioned sparingly only. Criticising Akbar, one of the renowned Pakistani historians, Qureshi (1962) wrote, “And in the final analysis, if the Muslims were to forget their uniqueness and come to absorb as Akbar did, contradictory tendencies and beliefs from other religions, could the Muslim nation continue to exist as a separate nation? Akbar’s policies created danger not only for the Muslim empire but also for the continued existence of the Muslim nation in the sub-continent” (p. 167).

The focus of textbooks in Pakistan has been on conquests of Muslim rulers in India to create a Muslim religious identity for Pakistan. Therefore, the ancient and modern local histories of different regions and provinces that joined Pakistan, is ignored. The period of Ranjit Singh’s Sikh empire is completely missing from the history text books in Punjab. Likewise, in Sindh the Hur movement against British rule and the political struggles of G.M. Syed, Hyder Bux Jatoi and Rasool Bux Palijo are not made part of the textbooks. Same has happened to the local history of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as local heroes and political figures are completely missing from the historical text taught in those provinces.

The textbooks that were written or updated during the Zia regime tried to give an impression; Islam entered the Indian region with the courtesy of the Arab conquest of Sindh. Moreover, the foundation of a separate country for Muslims, Pakistan was traced to the day when Mohammad Bin Qasim stepped in Sindh in 712 AD. In this regard, Asif (2016) quotes from a lesson “First Citizen” in Class VI Social Studies Textbook, first published in 1979:

“The Arab traders were staunch Muslims and therefore taught Islam to the people of India.....Some of the Muslims managed to escape and made aware of Hajjaj bin Yousaf of the entire incident. Conflict between the Arabs and ruler of Sind started due to this incident. Hajjaj bin Yusuf sent Muhammad bin Qasim to conquer Sind. This was the foundation of Pakistan (p. 7).”

Different causes behind the Arab invasion of Sindh are stated by Pakistani historians, however, the most important and major cause they claim was the release of the captive women and children. The story goes like this, when Hajjaj wrote a letter to release them, Dahir paid no attention to this request which infuriated Hajjaj, so in retaliation, he (Hajjaj) sent Arab forces in the leadership of his nephew Mohammad Bin Qasim basically to get the Muslim women released from the yoke of cruel Dahir. Hence, this narrative tries to establish, MBQ's expedition was not an invasion rather a humanitarian action for the poor captives. In this regard, Tanvir Anjum while writing about causes of the Arab invasion puts emphasis more on the merchant interests of the Umayyads. Anjum (2007) writes,

The causes of Arab invasion include, inter alia, help of the Persians by the rulers of Sindh and Makran against the Muslims, shelter given to rebel groups such as some members of the 'Ilafi tribe by Raja Dahir, and growing activities of pirates in the Indian Ocean hampering sea trade. However, the immediate cause was the plunder of eight merchant vessels by pirates near Debul (a coastal town in Sindh), which were carrying the families of the Arab settlers who had died in Sarandip (Sri Lanka), and gifts from the King of Sarandip for the Umayyad Caliph (p. 222).

In the same vein it is claimed, spreading the message of Islam to backward Sindh was no doubt an important reason as well. Haroon (2004) writes, ‘However, effacement of the curse of idolatry and polytheism and to spread the message of Islam among the downtrodden people of Sindh languishing under the coercive cast ridden Hindu Brahmin rule cannot be ruled out altogether’ (p. 40).

The detailed account goes like this, “the first major conflict between the peoples of the Indian subcontinent and Muslim Arabia arose out of developments connected with the Arab sailors plying in the Indian ocean” (Ikram, 2000, p. 1). When some of these sailors died, the local ruler sent widows and children of those sailors along with gifts and best wishes to Hajjaj Bin Yousif, a viceroy of Ummayad Empire of eastern provinces. When these survivors reached Debal, they were attacked and looted, and widows and children were kept as captives by the then ruler of Debal, Raja Dahir's forces. Amongst these widows a woman demanded/requested for help from Hajjaj.

When Hajjaj came to know this, he wrote to Raja Dahir to release the captives, but he did not receive positive reply from Dahir. Hence, Hajjaj decided to attack Sindh.

Ali (1994) in his book raises some questions on authenticity of this version. He writes, first it should be noted that when a girl/woman requested Hajjaj for help, how that request reached to Hajjah because if all women, children and people were attacked and made captives then who took her message to Hajjaj?. According to Ali (1994) even if we suppose somehow that Hajjaj was informed about the request of captive woman, still it is difficult to accept that Hajjaj sent such powerful force with full preparation in such a short span of time to attack Sindh merely to fulfil the request of Muslim woman in captivity (ibid, p. 73).

Moreover, Dr. Mubarak Ali, like G.M. Sayed questions if the Muslim woman's plea was a major reason for sending Mohammad Bin Qasim to attack Sindh in 712 then what about the Arab invasions of Sindh prior to this event. Before 712, during the period of Caliph Umar (634-644 AD) Mugheera attacked the city of Debal in Sindh. Likewise, during Caliph Ali's period (656-661AD), Muslim invaders reached Makran coast, but due to some political reasons, they did not go ahead. Then during the caliphate of Muawiyah (661-680), forces were sent to conquer Sindh, but his forces were defeated in Makran and could not proceed to Sindh (ibid).

Now, when we analyse this Pakistani state discourse on fall of Sindh in 712 from social constructivist perspective, it becomes clear that why this narrative glorifies the Arab conquest of Sindh and why MBQ is portrayed as a Muslim hero who spread Islam in the region. This state discourse clearly helps building the doctrine of 'two-nation theory' on which Pakistan was created in 1947. Therefore, it is logical and politically beneficial for the state narrative to show this event as a Muslim entry in India and overplay the heroics of MBQ while putting under the carpet the fallacies of the Arab rule in Sindh because this helps them build their two-nation theory vis-à-vis Hindu India. According to this narrative, it was not just a war between Dahir and MBQ; rather it was a conflict between the ideologies of Islam and Hinduism.

6. The Sindhi Nationalist Discourse

On the other hand, the Sindhi nationalists especially G.M. Sayed saw this with a different lens and from the opposite angle. G. M. Sayed saw the conquest of Sindh as part of the Arab imperialist designs using the word "samraj" the imperialist power for the Umayyad rule in his book *Sindh ja Soorma* (the heroes of Sindh). Sayed argued it was not Arab conquest but invasion, because the Arabs came in Sindh to capture it and establish their rule to loot and plunder the resources and wealth of Sindh. Unlike Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the other proponents of Pakistani state narrative who saw this as a conflict between Islam and Hinduism, Syed (1974) saw this as a conflict between the 'son of soil', a Sindhi ruler, Raja Dahir against the 'foreign Arab invader' Mohammad Bin Qasim. In his book Sayed openly condemned the

Arab invasion of Sindh and termed it as part of the imperialist designs of Arabs. G.M. Syed described MBQ as a usurper and villain who attacked Sindh just for the sake of looting and plundering resources of Sindh (pp. 11-12).

It is interesting to note here that to support his narrative G.M. Syed employed the 19th century concept of imperialism as a policy of colonial expansion on an 8th century event. He termed Umayyads as imperial power trying to colonize Sindh while Raja Dahir the local indigenous ruler gave his life defending the national boundaries of Sindh. Hence, he also used the modern concepts of nationalism and national armies defending the national boundaries on an 8th century event to prove his case.

Syed praises Raja Dahir for his bravery, wisdom, and strong peaceful thirty-two years long rule over Sindh during which he said the territory of Sindh was taken up to Multan. G.M. Syed states that Sindh was a peaceful land even before the Arab invasion that was why the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) once said that the cool air was blowing from Sindh to Arabia. G.M. Syed says although at that time, most of the residents of Sindh were followers of Buddhism and Hinduism, still the Holy Prophet kept the sense of goodwill for the people of Sindh. Syed completely rejects the argument that Arabs attacked Sindh to recover the captives. Like Ali (1994), he (1974) raises same question that if this was true then why Sindh was attacked by Arabs fourteen times before Sindh was invaded by MBQ in 712 (p. 75).

Syed (1974) described Raja Dahir as a 'soormo' (hero) of Sindh because he gave his life defending his 'motherland', Sindh. He quoted one saying of the Holy prophet, Mohammad "the love of homeland is an element of faith" and said he believed he who had no love for his homeland was unfaithful (ibid, p. 12). Therefore, he questioned how one can justify MBQs attacking Sindh, enslave men and women and unleashing the loot and plunder of the resources in the name of Islam (ibid).

G. M. Syed even believed Raja Dahir was supporter of Imam Hussain against Yazid in war of Karbala. In G. M. Syed's point of view, Raja Dahir was not only a hero for the people of Sindh, but at the same time, Dahir believed in universalism. M.S. Korejo writes, 'Syed claims that Dahir welcomed the message of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and even invited the Prophet's grandson Imam Hussain to take shelter in Sindh and thus escape persecution at the hands of Yazid. However, according to Syed, the Imam was intercepted at Kufa on his way to Sindh, where he met his tragic martyrdom' (Korejo, 2000, p. 77).

Hence, the Sindhi nationalist narrative see the fall of Sindh as a battle between the local Sindhi ruler, Raja Dahir who was defending the 'motherland Sindh' against imperialist ambitions of invading Arab commander MBQ and his boss Hajjaj bin Yousuf. Hence, for G.M. Syed and Sindhi nationalists' lens is different from the lens used by Pakistani state nationalists. State narrative saw this from the religious lens, a war between Muslims and Hindus because Pakistan was to be created on the basis of two-nation theory, while G.M. Syed

saw this from the lens of ethno-nationalism, a battle between local Sindhis against the foreign invasion.

For G.M. Syed, it was enough for Raja Dahir to be hero of Sindh simply because he was local Sindhi, same as for state narrative MBQ's being Muslim conqueror was good enough reason to be declared the hero of Pakistan. Both narratives use cherry-picking from the history to justify their own narratives and they do not care how badly the people of Sindh were or were not treated by Raja Dahir and Mohammad Bin Qasim.

In 1974 G.M. Sayed wrote his booklet *Sindh ja Soorma* where he declared Raja Dahir, the hero of Sindh for the first time. In 1974 Syed needed this discourse to justify his newly launched movement for the separation of Sindh from Pakistan, called the *Sindhu Desh* movement which was launched in 1972. Here it is interesting to note G.M. Sayed in his book *Paigham-e-Latif* (The message of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai) first published in 1952 has mentioned the 15th and 16th century characters Dolah Darya Khan, Makhdoom Bilawal and Dodo Soomro as heroes and advocates of Sindhi nationalism but failed to mention Raja Dahir as a hero of Sindh (Syed).

The timing for the entry of Raja Dahir as a hero of Sindh in 1974 clearly shows the political motive behind this move. G.M. Sayed started talking in terms of Sindhi nationalism by early 1950s which is evident even from the titles of the books he had published in that phase of his life. After partition his first book *Naen Sindh Lai Jedojehad* (The Struggle for New Sindh) was published in 1949, then came famous *Paigham-e-Latif* in 1952 in which he portrayed the famous Sufi poet, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai as a 'national poet of Sindh. *Mulsim League je Mukhalifat chha lai* (Why to oppose Muslim League) got also published in 1952 and then came *Pakistan mein Zaban jo Maslo ain Sindh Zaban* (The Language Issue in Pakistan and Sindhi Language) in 1953.

All this literature shows G.M. Sayed had become a Sindhi nationalist immediately after the partition of India in 1947. Then one wonders why only in 1974 Raja Dahir emerged as a hero of Sindh from his pen. Picking Raja Dahir, a Brahmin Hindu ruler of the 8th century as a hero of Sindh defending against a Muslim warrior MBQ suited G.M. Sayed's new political narrative of *Sindhudesh* that directly challenged the state narrative. G.M. Sayed was no more interested in the politics of Pakistan and only two years back had started demanding the independence of Sindh.

7. The Dalit Discourse

This is new emerging discourse in Sindh which is still in its embryonic phase therefore not much literature is produced yet by the proponents of this discourse. This discourse rejects the Sindhi nationalist discourse of G.M. Syed who considered Raja Dahir as a great ruler of Sindh. The Dalit discourse questions the heroic credentials of Raja Dahir and calls attention at Dahir's tyrannical behaviour with native lower caste Hindus and Buddhists of Sindh.

Before going through the newly constructed Dalit discourse about Chach and Arab rules in Sindh, one should understand concept and definition of the term Dalit. Explaining the Dalit identity in India, Bharati (2002) writes, 'Today, the subaltern communities that have been discriminated against for centuries identify themselves as Dalits. They find a new identity by coming together with the perspective 'Dalit is dignified' thereby rejecting the sub-human status imposed on them by the Hindu social order' (p. 4339). Bharati (2002) further writes about usage and definition of 'Dalit' term in contemporary period,

The clearest definition of Dalit in its contemporary usage comes from a letter written to Zelliot by Gangadhar Pantawane, a professor of Marathi at Milind College, now at Marathwada University in Aurangabad, and founder editor of Asmitadarsh (Mirror of Identity), the chief organ of Dalit literature: To me, Dalit is not the caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, holy books teaching separatism, fate and heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution" (p. 4339).

The abovementioned meaning and definition of Dalit term is about those lower caste communities living in India. Dalit Sujaag Tehrik (DST) applies same definition in the context of Sindh and claims all lower caste Hindus and Muslims living in Sindh are Dalit same as the lower castes living in India. The application of term Dalit in the context of Sindh is however questioned by Sindhi nationalists and some lower caste and upper caste Hindus living in Sindh.

The opponents of DST argue in Sindh, for people belonging to the lower castes, rather than casteism, problem of class difference is the real issue because deprived people do not belong to the lower caste Hindus only as deprivation prevails within poor Muslims as well. Moreover, the opponents claim as many among those lower castes themselves do not like to be called Dalit therefore this term is a misnomer as far as Sindh is concerned. In their point of view, Dalit identity suited lower caste people living in India but the case in Sindh is different in a way that in Sindh, all people are considered as Sindhis without any difference of caste and religion. They also claim that these Hindu communities are original Sindhis who have been living in Sindh since centuries. Therefore, they call term Dalit as zilat (insult) for these specific tribes.

To this criticism DST responds, someone may like it or not and may accept it or not but casteism is a social reality in Sindh (Hussain 2020). The researcher, Mahesar (2018) told the authors, even in India many among lower castes do not accept this term for themselves, instead they would prefer to use

other terms such as Moolnivasi, Bahujans, Adijan, 'indigenous' for themselves. But he said a clear majority throughout the world uses term Dalit for the marginalized lower castes or scheduled castes. Moreover, he questioned if all are equal Sindh is then why upper caste Hindus and Muslim Sindhis do not dine in the same utensils and inter-marry with the scheduled castes in Sindh?

The DST considers lower caste Hindus and Muslims both as Dalit because they receive almost similar treatment from the upper castes. They argue Dalit is not the identity to feel proud of, but to assert equal rights and dignified existence. The Dalit leaders in Sindh take anti-Dalit reactions from Sindhi nationalists as a kind of acceptance of 'Dalit' assertion to seek the dignified social status within Sindh where according to them Sindhi Sammat and Baloch tribal caste order still prevails.

Coming back to the debate over Mohammad Bin Qasim's attack on Sindh in 712, the major argument of the Dalits is that, before the Brahmin rule of Chach (father of Raja Dahir), there was rule of Buddhist Raikings of the Sudra caste, which they claim was a Dalit caste (Kainikara 2016). They claim that Chach was not a real 'son of soil' as claimed by G.M. Syed but a Kashmiri Brahmin who had overthrown the Dalit ruler, Rai Sahassi-II by deceit and an organized conspiracy. Therefore, they consider Chach equally a usurper and invader as was MBQ. They consider Raja Dahir, an heir of the usurper Chach and blame him for his cruelty and tyranny against the locals belonging to lower and downtrodden classes of Sindh.

Dr. Mubarak Ali has shared the story of how Chach dethroned Rai Sahasi-II by conspiracy. During Sahassi rule, Chach, a well-known religious literate Brahmin and an expert on administrative affairs was appointed in order to look after Sahasi's administrative affairs. Ali (1994) writes, according to unconfirmed reports, Sahasi's wife Mohin Devihad fallen in love with Chach so it was quite possible that after the death of Sahasi-II, she might have helped Chach in overthrowing the Rai Sahasi dynasty as after establishing his rule, Chach had married her (p. 69).

Dr. Mubarak Ali also writes about some tribes who were humiliated and badly treated by Chach but he did not call those tribes as lower caste Hindus or Dalits. Dr. Mubarak names some of those tribes as Channa, Sama, Sahita, Lakha and Lohana (ibid, p. 70). Among those tribes specifically Sama and Lohana were surely not lower-caste tribes as Samas later ruled Sindh as well. This raises questions over the claim that during the Brahmin rule of Chach dynasty; lower caste Dalits were humiliated and discriminated based on their caste by Chach and his successors. According to Kainikara (2016), Jats, Meds and Buddhists constituted the bulk of the population of Sindh at that time and they were all maltreated by Chach and his predecessors.

The Dalit discourse interestingly puts all those non-Brahmin communities into Dalit umbrella and terms them as Dalits. Even they describe the Buddhist Rai Sahasi dynasty as Dalit dynasty. The Dalit discourse divides the people of Sindh into Dalits and Non-Dalits and wants us to go further back in history and see fall of Sindh at the hands of Chach dynasty. Looking at this

from social constructivist perspective it is understandable why Dalit discourse is doing this. They are developing their discourse based on Dalit sufferings at the hands of Brahmin Hindus in Sindh, therefore, it surely suits them to divide the people of Sindh in 8th century AD into Dalits and Non-Dalits as well so that they can draw their roots back to that period. Nonetheless, as the Dalit discourse is still in its embryonic stage, therefore, it still has a long way to develop its argument on powerful historical evidence.

8. Conclusion

This study shows how different discourses use cherry-picking technique to interpret the history so that they can build an argument for their narrative which serves their political interests in the present. The reality is constructed to suit the ideology they want to create and the political goal they want to achieve. Such discourses like us to see history with single lens, the lens of their own identity which they want to use for their political programme. The Pakistani state narrative like people to see the fall of Sindh from the lens of Muslim identity, while Sindhi nationalists like them to interpret it based on Sindhi identity and the Dalit discourse based on Dalit identity. It is interesting to observe how history casts its shadow on the present, while present tries to construct the 'reality' in the past.

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