

Both of these books deal with state formation among Muslims, though their ambitions and scope differ. Allen Jones provides a detailed portrait of the Pakistani province of Sindh prior to 1940. Despite its subtitle, his book says very little about Muslim identity or the demand for Pakistan. It does tell a great deal indeed about the background, motives, and political manipulations of the major Sindhi Muslim leaders and powerbrokers during the crucial era leading up to partition.

The book was written in 1977 as the author's doctoral dissertation, and there has been no effort whatsoever to update the references or bolster the theoretical armature, which is very skeletal in any case. Luckily, the absence of more recent material is not hugely important, since the book is primarily based on extensive first hand interviews as well as a variety of public and private primary sources and contemporary news accounts. Skillfully weaving this data together, Jones shows
how Sindhi Muslims, although living in a region where Hindus dominated the urban areas and the economy, were able to press successfully for Sindhi autonomy in 1936. Unfortunately, their fledgling political organization was soon undermined by personal ambitions and rivalries among local leaders. Jones carefully describes the ever-shifting alliances and betrayals of a wide cast of political actors. There are no heroes in his even-handed account, though perhaps the industrious and all-India minded Hindu convert, Sheikh Abdul Majid Sindhi, and his erstwhile rival and ally, the Karachi born Memon Abdullah Haroon, come closest to overcoming the petty bickering of their compatriots.

Jones shows how this Sindhi Muslim political elite eventually began to pursue political agendas rather than pure power, and realized that their fortunes had to be tied to the larger policies of the all-India Muslim League. The moral high-point of the book is in 1941, when Sindhi ministers stepped down from power rather than reach a compromise that would have destroyed the integrity of the League. For Jones, this show of solidarity at the cost of personal authority demonstrated that the party was now ready to take on responsible political leadership.

The book ends very positively, with Sindh governed by principled civilian leaders who had the ability to provide a sound base for building a relatively secular democratic society after partition. If that is so, then why is Pakistan in its present situation?
Sayyed Nasr's book goes some way toward answering that complicated question. Like Allen Jones, he is a meticulous researcher, but where Jones focuses on the micro-politics of local alliances at the close of colonialism, Nasr is more ambitious and wider ranging. In Gramscian fashion, he argues that states use whatever cultural resources they can to bolster their legitimacy and give them better capacity to extract resources and expand control over a potentially rebellious citizenry. Islam is obviously a major cultural resource for affirming the legitimacy of states with Muslim populations. A ruler who can persuasively claim to represent Islam has a strong hold on the hearts and minds of the devout. However, this is easier said than done, since members of the religious classes make their own claims for spiritual authority, often in direct opposition to governments which they portray as corrupt and secular.

The continuous struggle for legitimacy waged between states and clerics can have various outcomes: the rejection of Islam by the state, as has sporadically occurred in Algeria and Turkey; the state's opportunistic attempt to manipulate Islam, as in Egypt, Jordan and Indonesia; or the thorough Islamicization of the state, as has transpired since 1970 in Malaysia and Pakistan. Nasr analyzes this latter trajectory, showing how both Malaysia and Pakistan began as relatively weak and multi-ethnic new nations which did not go through unifying independence struggles. Rather, they inherited the colonial institutional apparatus while their political elites remained
closely linked to the colonial power. As a result of these factors, there was little popular sense of national unity in either country, and the fragmented and feeble state structure required very substantial cultural buttressing to retain its authority. Islamicization of the state temporarily solved the problem of legitimacy and provided Pakistan and Malaysia a much needed period of relative stability.

Nasr's argument effectively turns the usual Western perspective on Islam and the state on its head. Far from being a threat, he says that Islam has proven to be a viable tool in these two states' struggles for expansion and hegemony. There have been serious costs: among them, discrimination against minorities, increasingly ideological public discourse, and unrealistic policy decisions. Furthermore, Nasr admits that in both cases financial crises have once again delegitimized state authority. So, in the long run, Islamicization has failed to produce a social base for a legitimate government in either Pakistan or Malaysia. Yet, without it, neither state would have survived at all. On this ambivalent note, Sayyid Nasr concludes his remarkably detached survey of a dismal situation.

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