Following Richard Burton: Religious Identity and Difference in Colonial Sindh

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Abstract

Richard Burton, soldier, ethnographer, translator, philologist, and colonial intelligence-gatherer spent the early years of his career in Sindh and was the first and primary colonial ethnographer of Sindh. Burton was clearly attracted to the ecumenical complexity of Sindhi religious practice but was hostile in his descriptions of Sindh's Hindus whom he viewed as a corrupt and scheming “race,” subjecting the Muslims of the province to their tyranny. The article examines how Burton's racialised ethnographies of Sindh cast Sindh as distinct from "India" and Hindus as outsider immigrants to the province. Paradoxically, Burton's narratives also created Sindh as the space par excellence of the negation of religious categories. However, this categorisation of Sindh also highlighted it as a space distinct from India. In conclusion, the article shows how the idea of Sindh's separate identity maintained a strong afterlife in colonial Sindh, rearticulated in certain key contexts.

Keywords


Introduction

Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821–1890) is best known for his translations of the Kama Sutra and the Arabian Nights, and his 1853 pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in disguise. He wrote prodigiously on the places he visited and is in turn the subject of numerous biographies. It was in Sindh that Burton first began to formulate and express the ideas that would develop into his prolific
corpus of historiography, ethnography, philology, and translation that covered disparate corners of the world.¹

Burton was instrumental in creating colonial repositories of knowledge on Sindh.² His travelogue-ethnographies of Sindh also remain a rich primary source for the contemporary historian of Sindh, even as Burton himself was elusive about his own sources. This article will focus on a hitherto largely overlooked aspect of Burton’s ethnographies of Sindh: his distinctions between “Sindh” and “India” and between “the Sindhi” and “the Hindu.” Sindh’s position as a region distinct from the rest of India continued to be a preoccupation of both British officials and Sindhis themselves right up to partition and independence.³ This article highlights Burton’s early contributions to the longer-term colonial history of circumscribing Sindh and sorting “Sindhis” and “Hindus” as discrete categories.⁴

I focus at first on Burton’s argument that “Sindhis” and “Hindus” were separate races. Burton began to elaborate on his racialised theory of Hindu difference and “deviance”⁵ in Sindh, where he spent the early and formative years of his career. Burton would go on to apply this model of racial difference to other communities he observed in his travels outside of South Asia. David

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Arnold points out that the concept of “race” in nineteenth-century India was commonly used to distinguish between Hindus and Muslims as Burton does in Sindh. Burton’s schema also encompasses another layer, of separating the “Hindus” as “foreign” to Sindh. Burton asserted that Sindh was peopled by a number of “foreigners” of which the “Hindus” were the most egregious example. Sarah Ansari has shown how at certain junctures in the history of colonial Sindh the animus against the dominant Hindu could join with anti-migrant resentment to produce the category of the “non-Sindhi.” I draw into focus how Burton wrote a history of migration to Sindh that represented an early iteration of the territorialisation of Sindhi identities. Scholars have demonstrated how the European perception of a “Hindu India” turned Muslims into outsiders in the subcontinent. Through a reading of Burton’s texts, I show that in Burton’s perception of Sindh’s geography and migration to it, an inversion takes place when he creates a difference between the “Sindhi” and the outsider “Hindu.”

At the same time as Burton sought to locate communal and racial identities within his notions of “difference,” somewhat contrarily, he was enormously fascinated by the heterodoxy of religious practice he encountered in Sindh and wrote about it in some detail. The liminality of religious traditions Burton observed in Sindh both challenged his classifications of Hindu and Muslim difference as well as led him to give the dominant “faith” of Sindh a name: Sufism. Michel Boivin has recently studied the influence of Burton’s commentaries on Sindhi religious identity, in assigning a “Sufi” identity to Sindh. I argue that the Burtonian vision of “Sufi” Sindh also contributed to a broader vision that the Sindh literati later developed—that Sindh and Sindhis were uniquely set apart from the rest of India.

In the second part of the article, I briefly outline how debates on Sindh’s “otherness” and on who did or did not belong there were increasingly foregrounded over the course of colonial rule. I do not intend to provide a teleological narrative from Burton to independence but to indicate how the framework of bordering Sindh and Sindhis as distinct from their surrounding geographies became a powerful and enduring one. In conclusion, I return to the question of religious identity and ask what Sindh’s distinction as a

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6 David Arnold, “Race, Place and Bodily Difference in early Nineteenth-Century India,” *Historical Research* 77 (2004): 265.
9 Boivin, *The Sufi Paradigm*.
liminal space of religiosity might mean for histories of religious modernity in colonial India.

A note of caution: readers should remember that the terms “Hindu” and “Muslim” can shroud as much as they reveal.

**Race and the Sindhi Hindu “Other”**

Burton began his sojourn in Sindh in 1844, almost as soon as it became a part of the British empire, and stayed there until 1849. Charles Napier had annexed Sindh to British India in 1843, and in 1847 Sindh was attached to the Bombay Presidency. As Chris Bayly showed, “the information order” of nineteenth-century colonial North India depended on army officers to accumulate and interpret information. Burton travelled to Sindh from Baroda in the employ of the East India Company’s army. He was deeply invested in “ethnology” and was to go on to found the Anthropological Society of London. He acted as an informant for the Company, writing three major books on the region, *Scinde; or, the Unhappy Valley* (1851); *Sindh and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Indus* (1851); and *Falconry in the Valley of the Indus* (1852). Burton returned to Sindh with his wife Isabel more than twenty years later, after which he wrote *Sind Revisited* (1877).

It was in Sindh that Burton began to disguise himself as a “native.” He moved around Sindh as a spy, dressed as a “half Arab, half Iranian,” to pass “as an Oriental.” This was “as necessary as it was difficult” because “the European

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12 Burton makes several references to ethnography in his writing.

13 Arondekar details the activities of the controversial ASL *For the record*, ch. 1.

14 Burton had also produced earlier reports, including one in 1847, entitled “Notes Relative to the Population of Sind; and the Customs, Languages, and Literature of the People,” in *Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government*, vol. 17, n.s. (Bombay: Bombay Education Society’s Press, 1855), 637–657. Arondekar has discussed his secret reports for Napier on Karachi’s male brothels. Arondekar, *For the Record*, ch. 1.


official in India seldom, if ever sees anything in its real light.” He wrote *Scinde; or, the Unhappy Valley* in the style of a travelogue, as a conversation with his companion a Mr John Bull, to whom Burton acts as a “tourist guide,” translator, and interpreter between cultures. He mocks Bull’s Englishness and inability to see in these new surroundings, in contrast to what he himself claims to perceive. The travelogue is accompanied by the more ethnographic account in *Sindh and the Races.*

Burton, who was proficient in several languages, including Indian languages, saw himself as different to other European observers—exceptional in his capacity to “go native” and record the truth of his surroundings. Edward Said was appreciative of Burton’s scholarliness and saw him as singular in his abilities “to become an oriental,” and distance himself from his European moorings. Yet, Burton was never able to remove himself from his role of imperial surveillance completely, and it is in his constructions of race that the dissociations he puts in place between himself and those he surveys become the most apparent.

Scholars have considered British information gathering in India, the marking of categories of difference, and the making of the “ethnographic state.” Dane Kennedy argues that Burton was very much a product of Victorian Britain, in which the rubric of difference and the impulse to categorise the imperial world based on difference had a considerable salience, even as Burton constantly struggled to reconcile the diverse peoples and worlds he encountered with his own hardening ideologies of race. As Kennedy points out, Burton’s initial ideas on race emerged in Sindh, encompassing at first a philological understanding, and then a physiological and cultural one. Burton began to attribute geographical, physical, and biological markers to race in the Sindh years, most starkly in the figure of the Hindu—or more properly in the figure of the economically dominant section of the Lohana Hindus. In Burton’s hierarchy of physical and racial characteristics, the Persian Muslims are “probably the most perfect specimen of the Caucasian type,” while Hindus

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18 Ghose, “Imperial Player,” 72.
19 Sind Revisited is also addressed to the hapless Mr Bull.
22 Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man,* 3 and passim.
are “the most imperfect” and “Sindhis” are an admixture of the two. In *Scinde or the Unhappy Valley* we encounter Burton’s repulsion for the Hindus of Sindh in his vividly anatomical description of the *munshi* Hari Chand to Bull,

> a portly pulpy Hindoo, the very type of his unamiable race, with a cat-like gait, a bow of exquisite finish; a habit of sweetly smiling under every emotion, whether the produce of a bribe or a kick; a softly murmuring voice, with a tendency to sinking; and a glance which seldom meets yours, and when it does, seems not quite to enjoy the meeting. How timidly he appears at the door! How deferentially he slides in, salaams, looks deprecat ing, and at last is induced to sit down! Above all things how he listens! Might he not be mistaken for a novel kind of automaton, into which you can transfer your mind and thoughts—a curious piece of human mechanism in the shape of a creature endowed with all things but a self.

An interpreter and interlocutor, the *munshi* was the “archetypal figure of the collaborationist.” In Burton’s exposition, Hari Chand changes his opinions according to what he thinks is going through his visitors’ mind, revealing himself to be completely lacking in personhood of any sort, but the desire to profit from any exchange. There is a deep irony in this, as Burton attempted to replace the *munshi* in becoming a “native informant” himself and hiding who he was. Burton himself was the principal “mimic man” in the environments he penetrated as a colonial spectator and participant in disguise.

This transactional approach to human interaction characterises Burton’s portrayal of the dominant Lohana castes of “crafty” Hindus. By “Hindu” here

24 Burton, *Sindh and the Races*, 283. However, Burton characterises the Hindu Amils “as better-looking than common Sindhis,” 341.
25 Burton, *Scinde or the Unhappy Valley*, 231.
27 Boivin, *The Sufi Paradigm*, 9. As Boivin points out, contrary to common assumptions, Sindh *munshis* were not always Hindu.
30 Burton, *Sindh and the Races*, 47.
Burton meant the “banyans” (Banias) and the Amils (the literate section of the Lohana who were often occupied as civil officers). The Bania, besides charging a huge amount of interest his creditor cannot hope to repay, keeps his accounts “in a state of confusion” that only he can understand. “The Hindoo’s reed pen is a rod of iron, and abjectly the unhappy Scindian trembles before it.”31 Burton writes of a meeting with a creditor who sought Burton's intervention to have his debts paid, “a dirty, cringing Hindoo, with Shylock written in every line of his cold, lean, greedy countenance.”32 The Shikarpur Hindu is the quintessential “Shylock” with his “piercing black eye, wrinkled brow, hooked nose, thin lips, … cheeks of crumpled parchment” and “villainous expression.”33 I will not discuss Burton's analysis of the Khoja here but Burton reserved similar disgust for the Aga Khan Hasan Ali Shah and his Khoja followers many of whom were also traders.34 Thus occupation also influenced Burton's interpretation of race which was in turn linked to his virulent anti-Semitic views.

It is pertinent to add here that Burton claimed that the Vaishya caste—of which the Lohana is a division—and to which the Bania belongs—included numerous trades such as Wahun (grain-toaster); Khatti (dyer), hajjam (“who combines the employment of cupping and shaving”) “and the sochi, who makes cloth slippers, but leaves leather slippers to the impure mochi.”35 The Lohana are the most numerous and powerful, and Burton argued, “a description of them, therefore, will be a general portrait of the Sindh Hindoos.”36 But there were many types of Lohana. According to Burton there were fifty sub-divisions, and his sub-category of “Bania” covered a range of people from vastly different social backgrounds and trades, some of which were considered lowly. Regardless of these differences in the groups of people classed as Bania, it was the image of the Shylockian, exploitative, and well-to-do Bania (Bhaiband or Shikarpuri) at the top of the hierarchy that prevailed in colonial Sindh,37 overshadowing the presence of these other groups. Burton’s ethnography of the “Bania” therefore raises the question: who is the Sindhi Hindu Bania? The operation of caste in early colonial Sindh, across communal divisions, requires much further historiographical work. Based on existing accounts, including Burton’s, no singular system of caste prevailed, and there were significant

31 Burton, Scinde or the Unhappy Valley, 1:254–255.
32 Burton, Scinde or the Unhappy Valley, 1:255.
33 Burton, Scinde or the Unhappy Valley, 2:270–271.
34 Other trading communities in Sindh included the Muslim Memons and Bohras.
35 Burton, Scinde or the Unhappy Valley, 1:245.
36 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 314.
intra-regional differences in how caste was practiced, for instance between the desert regions of Tharparkar and northern Sindh.\textsuperscript{38} Future scholarship on caste and communal identity in colonial Sindh would need to read Burton against the grain to account for the contradictions in his typology of the Bania, which may have a relevance in the study of caste beyond Sindh.\textsuperscript{39}

The Sindhi Hindu Amils who constituted most of (but not all) the literati—to whom Burton devoted an entire chapter in \textit{Sindh and the Races}—were employed by the \textit{mirs} as civil officers and are, to Burton, as loathsome as the Bania.\textsuperscript{40} Burton was critical of what he saw as the Amils’ pretensions to learning.\textsuperscript{41} They were also subject to examination under Burton’s anti-Semitic lens. The Amils “by diligently studying the art of deceit … elevated their social position. They alternately served and sold, flattered and forsook the princes; bribed and bullied the middle ranks of Moslems … and they ruled with a rod of iron the common people whose debts and necessities enslaved them to Hindoo Shroffs and Banyans.”\textsuperscript{42} The Amil is a master forger, “writing a good feigned hand, … copying documents with deceptive skill … dexterous at making a fresh paper look old and worn, as a London Jew at manufacturing a Guido; … he practises till perfect … the many ways of forging a seal.”\textsuperscript{43} Burton was critical of the Muslim zamindar class, accusing them of being “debauched” and “idle”\textsuperscript{44} but as Kennedy argues,

If the Hindu assumes the attributes of the anti-Semite’s Jew, then analogy suggests that the Muslim he victimizes must take on the role of the Christian. Though Burton never draws this unsettling correspondence directly, he does declare where his sympathies lie.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{39} So far, studies of the Bania have concentrated on them as a commercial caste and on Marwari Bania kinship ties and family firms. Histories of the Sindhi Bhiaiband and Shikarpuri Bania have focused on the diasporic community as a dominant caste of bankers and merchants, emphasising the importance of community ties based on locality rather than caste for these groups. Claude Markovits, \textit{The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 257–259. Burton’s claims on the variety of Lohana in early colonial Sindh which he classified as “Bania” need to be investigated further.
\textsuperscript{40} Amils were not the only literati, the Ismailis and Parsis constituted other such groups which Burton ignored. Boivin, \textit{The Sufi Paradigm}, 10.
\textsuperscript{41} Burton, \textit{Sindh and the Races}, 149.
\textsuperscript{43} Burton, \textit{Scinde or the Unhappy Valley}, 1:242.
\textsuperscript{44} Burton, \textit{Sindh and the Races}, 46.
\textsuperscript{45} Kennedy, \textit{The Highly Civilized Man}, 48.
Burton was part of a wider world of “explorers” and Orientalists behind projects of social scientific study in the nineteenth century whose investigations contained diligent anatomical descriptions. Detailed pathologies became representative of “race” which was in turn connected to “place” and climate. As Durba Mitra notes, by the early nineteenth century, the Asiatic Society had shifted its focus from philological enquiry “to surveys and scientific studies of everything from pathology to botany to race science and demography.” Burton was one of the pioneers of this form of racialised enquiry, and one of the most influential. He travelled in East Africa as a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society soon after his stint in Sindh, where he expatiated his physiognomic categorisations of racial groups. He was to become one of the leading advocates in the age of “scientific racism” of the idea that Africans were an inferior race. Burton created a vertical racial hierarchy in which the white European was superior to the Black African but also established horizontal relationships between the groups he considered the most contemptible over a wide geographical distance. He modelled the Sindhi Hindu on the anti-Semite’s Jew, and the citizens of Harar on the Jew and the Sindhi Hindu, revealing how it was not only Sindh, but a wider world that bore the burden of the racial taxonomies he began to put in place in Sindh. What was common to all these groups was Burton’s insistence that they were only capable of deceit. Burton then developed his attributions of deceit to sections of the populations he surveyed into a critique of mimicry. If the London Jew and the Sindhi Hindu were masters of forgery and deceit, Europeanised Africans were only capable of mimicry.

The “fraudulence” of the Sindhi Hindus is accompanied by their lack of nativity to Sindh. What stands out in Burton’s account in his chronicle of the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims of Sindh along with the fierce competition.
anti-Semitic hostility he redirected to the Hindus is that the Hindus are not “Scindian” or are differentiated from the—also racialised—“Sindhi proper” [my emphasis]. This differentiation finds a biological, racial logic: The “Sindhi” might not be as perfect as the Persian Muslim, but he is certainly “a taller, stronger, more robust and more muscular man than the native of Western India,” from where the Hindu is supposed to have come. Burton distinguished between several “foreign tribes in Sindh,” Hindus, and Sindhi Muslims. Although Burton put them in a separate category to “foreign tribes,” the Hindus are also “foreign,” and Burton gave them the most detailed attention of all the “foreign” groups he found in Sindh. The layout of Burton’s books replicates this division: with separate chapters on the Sindhis “proper” with the chapters immediately following or preceding dedicated to the Hindus.

Separating the “foreign” from the “aboriginal” or the “original native” was a feature of colonial social scientific enquiry in various parts of India. Most often, colonial historiographers cast Muslim invaders as the original colonisers of India, as “foreigners” in an indigenously “Hindu” land asserting a “categorical difference between the Hindu subjects and the Muslim rulers.” James Mill’s The History of British India (1817) famously divided the history of India into three parts: Hindu, Muslim, and British. This was a chronology to which later Hindu nationalists became (and remain) wedded. Officials of the East India Company justified British rule as liberating Hindus from the clutches of “foreign” Muslim tyranny. As Manan Ahmed Asif has argued, the British quest to fix Muslim “origins” in India shaped nationalist historiography as native historians attempted to deal with the question of Muslim “arrival.”

One such narrative that assumed a great deal of importance centred on the early eighth-century campaigns from Arabia to Sindh under Muhammad bin Qasim, particularly as described in the thirteenth-century Persian text the Chachnama, which “became, in colonial understanding, a

52 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 283. The first gazetteer of Sindh repeated these assertions on the physicality of the Sindhi Muslim as compared to the Hindu. Albert William Hughes, A Gazetteer of the Province of Sind (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874).
53 Arnold, “Race, Place and Bodily Difference.”
54 A history of Sindh was written along these lines in the early nineteenth century by James McMurdo, James McMurdo’s Account of Sind (Karachi: Oxford University Press/Oxford Asia Historical Reprints, 2007). See also Thomas Postans, Personal Observations on Sind; the Manners and Customs of its Inhabitants, and its Productive Capabilities; with a Sketch of its History, a Narrative of Recent Events, and an Account of the Connection of the British Government with that Country (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1843).
56 Ahmed Asif, A Book of Conquest, 171.
history of Muslim origins.” Burton frequently repeated these theories, mixing parts of the *Chachnama* into his accounts of Sindh and associating the arrival of Islam with violent Arab invasion and the forcible incorporation of a “heterogeneous mass of converts ... with the original stock of the Faithful,” on an indigenously Hindu land. British officials in Sindh before Burton had characterised the Muslim Talpur rulers as military despots who uniformly oppressed Hindus, despite evidence to the contrary. Burton’s assessment was similar. But throughout his narratives on Sindh he simultaneously inverted the trope of the invading and cruel Muslim to claim that none of the Hindus in Sindh were currently “original” but of a different “race” and it is the Muslims who are the subject of interminable Hindu tyranny. In doing so, he reverses the trend in the British historiography that preceded him.

A history of migration underlay Burton’s theories of race and origin. The true “Scindian,” in Burton’s view, was “probably the descendant of the ancient Hindu race that possessed the country, with a slight admixture of Arab, Beloch, Brahm and Afghan blood in his veins.” Despite his understanding that a multi-layered history of migration would have played a role in the making of the Sindhis, Burton’s explanation for why the Hindus of Sindh were of a different “race” and alien to Sindh was that they were later migrants (all the “originals” having converted to Islam). He created a detailed taxonomy and history for where each group of Hindus came from. At one point he asserts that the Hindus are of Punjabi origin, as attested by their physical features and “tendency towards the faith of Nanak Shah.” The Pokarno Brahmins “have migrated from Jaisalmeri, Cutch, Multan, the Panjab, and other remote localities,” the Sarsat Brahmins “are supposed to have emigrated to Sindh about two centuries ago.” “The Lohano derives his origin and name from Lohanpur in Multan: the date of his emigration is lost in the obscurity of antiquity.” The proof that the Lohana emigration took place a long time ago

59 Burton, *Scinde or the Unhappy Valley*, 1:121–122.
61 The sole redeeming feature of the Hindus in Burton’s eyes was their love for their children, despite its “excess.” Burton, *Scinde or the Unhappy Valley*, 1:248. This contrast is reflected in the title of one of his chapters *The Hindoos of Scinde—their Rascality and their Philoprogenitiveness*. Burton, *Scinde or the Unhappy Valley*, ch. xiii.
62 Burton, *Scinde or the Unhappy Valley*, 1:251.
64 Burton, *Sindh and the Races*, 310.
is evidenced “in change of language and invention of several alphabets.”66 Notwithstanding the apparent assimilation of the Hindus into Sindh, and the obscurity of the date of their migration, they are still outsiders. Burton’s originary narrative consequently devoted some time to establishing the current Hindus’ foreign status. The “outsider” status of the Hindus and their role as part of an oppressive political and economic elite were important themes throughout the history of the administration of colonial Sindh. Colonial officials (who had themselves encouraged migrant labour to the province) framed the migrant as an oppressive interloper67 while Sindhis increasingly began to complain about “non-Sindhis” ruling the roost.68

For Burton to categorise different groups of people who lived in Sindh as “foreign,” he had to distinguish Sindh itself from other territories. Ideas of the region in early modern Sindh were not fixed and were refashioned in different historical and political contexts. The meaning of “Sindh” and its boundaries shifted over time and did not signify an exclusionary identity based on a common history, genealogy, and language as it came to be understood in colonial India.69 Arnold shows that “comparison” and “contrast” were key modes of constructing racial difference in nineteenth-century India—between bodies—and between geographies. Where at first Europeans compared their bodies and the effects of climate and “place” on themselves as compared to the bodies of Indians, these comparisons then extended to an insatiable appetite for comparisons and contrasts within and throughout the diverse landscape of their Indian empire.70 Burton territorialised Sindh, the people there, and their relationship to each other and the region by comparing and distinguishing Sindh from surrounding geographies. He began Sindh and the Races with the declaration that “[t]he traveller who visits Sindh after Western India, sees at the first glance that he has entered a new land … The forms and features, the complexion and costume of the inhabitants, also appear strange to the Indian tourist.”71 Burton expanded on Sindh’s distinctiveness in his frequently caustic descriptions of Sindh and its inhabitants, calling it “a semi-barbarous country,” and pronounced that the Sindhi was both inferior “to the Arab in dignified

66 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 314.
69 Shayan Rajani, “Reimagining the World, Remaking the Region: Distinction and Difference in Early Modern and Modern Sindh” (PhD diss., Tufts University, 2018).
70 Arnold, “Race, Place and Bodily Difference.”
71 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 1.
deportment and manliness of address” as well as lacking in “the soft and exquisitely polished manners of the Indians.”72 Right from the start, Sindh is established as part of a separate, bounded, physical geography; differentiated from India, but also constituted as a buffer zone between the Persian and Indian worlds. “India” is often a point of reference for Burton, to compare whether Sindhi traditions are similar to or different from practices there, in everything from the way the Sindhis “proper” dress to their knowledge of music, and methods of playing games.73 Similarly, some Sindhi Sufi practices were “clearly derived from” “Hindustan,” marking India as a source of influence, but as a discrete entity.74

Numinous Bonds and the Boundaries of Religious Practice

Burton is buried in the churchyard of St Mary Magdalen’s Roman Catholic Church in the London suburb of Mortlake, on the south bank of the river Thames between Kew and Barnes. Constructed in the shape of a tent, the edifice is made of Carrara marble and Forest of Dean stone. It is carved to resemble the folds of cloth and is capped with a Star of David, displays a prominent Jesus on the Cross, and is ringed with a golden pattern of the Islamic star and crescent. At the back of the mausoleum is a ladder so that the visitor can climb up and look through a glass pane into the mausoleum to view the coffins of Burton and his wife. Next to their coffins are coloured glass lamps and on Burton’s tomb is a string of camel bells. Burton’s tomb is a curiosity for the passer-by, bearing the imprints of diverse religious traditions, cultures, and travel; the ladder invites visitors to his tomb to conduct their own ethnography of the ethnographer within. Burton’s tomb was designed as a liminal space, the tent an aperture through which to enter other worlds, evocative of his own life as a spectator and often disguised participant in a variety of cultural environments and religious traditions.

Burton was not content with simply performing what Parama Roy calls the “specular version” of the colonised subject and was fond of assuming multiple identities—becoming the “English official” Burton as well as his informant “Mirza Abdullah.”75 In addition to experimenting with a multitude of identities Burton hovers on the borders of spaces and places.

72 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 163.
73 Chapter XI of Sindh and the Races is replete with such comparisons.
74 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 208.
75 Roy, Indian Traffic, 21.
As a ‘half-Arab, half-Persian’ merchant in Sind, he is an outsider who can pass as an Oriental because little is known about the national/ethnic, linguistic, and other categories he supposedly inhabits. He must depend to some degree on local ignorance of ‘the real thing.’ Similarly, in Hejaz and Arabia he can be an outsider once more, this time a Pathan; wherever he goes, he signifies a pervasive liminality, if not a pervasive alterity.  

Burton was an insider and an outsider at once. In Sindh he found a religious world free from his expected normative constraints, where Sindhis had an assorted range of religious attachments and relationships, that reflected his own desire for “heterogeneous affiliations.”  

Burton was deeply attracted to Sindhi religiosity, fascinated by the convergence of the multitude of traditions he witnessed in Sindh, and developed his early theories of syncretism there. The concord of religious traditions Burton saw in Sindh was also what made him mark Sindh as unusually defined. Scholars have highlighted Burton’s admiration for Islam, which he argued had its own singular manifestation in Sindh. This faith he named “Sufism” (taṣawwuf), and called it “the religion of beauty.” He was also captivated by Sindhi Sufism’s probable borrowings from Hinduism, writing, “There is certainly a wonderful resemblance between Tasawwuf and the Vedantic system; and the modern Indian’s opinions concerning the efficacy of Jog (penance and abstinence), exactly contain the Sufi’s ideas of Riyazat.” Michel Boivin has discussed how Burton, followed by colonial and local agents, both produced knowledge about and understood Sindh’s religious milieu through the lens of Sufism at length, so I shall not go into that here. Nor do I propose to enter into a discussion of what Sindhi Sufism is. However, I will highlight certain paradoxes that emerge when one considers Burton’s narrative on Hinduism in Sindh as opposed to his opinions on the Hindus.  

Burton noted that Hinduism is not to be found in a state of purity in Sindh … Hinduism here is mixed up with the heterogeneous elements of Islam, and the faith of Nanak Shah.
A Hindoo will often become the Murid (follower) of a Mussulman, and in some cases the contrary takes place.84

In Burton’s view, the Hindus of Sindh saw the Hindu pantheon as intercessors with “the Deity,” similar to the paighambar of the Muslims. Both Hindus and Muslims venerate pirs who are “sub-intercessors”;85 one of them is revered as a personification of the river Indus.86 This lack of “purity” in Sindhi Hinduism was a feature that Burton understood as a positive development, in a system he otherwise perceived as imbued with fantasy and unnecessary accretions.

While Burton was occupied with creating empirical typologies, he did not recognise this as a feature in himself and criticised western Orientalists for their grasp of and rationalisations of Hinduism. He argued, “nothing can be more ridiculous than the effect produced by Hinduism, smartly dressed up as it has been in European clothing—a system of wild superstition, explained, emblematised, and typified by western speculators till its very form ceases to be recognisable.”87 But in Sindh, Burton saw improvements to the Hindu faith where it had apparently shed its burdensome clothing. For one, “From the Sikhs, the Sindh Hindoo has learned to simplify his faith: to believe in one God.”88 Secondly, the Sindhi Hindu trader has lived “in subjection to the stranger” for such long periods abroad, “that he has unconsciously but very palpably emancipated himself from much of the galling bondage of a faith which fears progress as much as destruction.”89 For Burton, the Bania’s history of travel in pursuit of wealth had forced him to give up certain strictures of caste, making him more “cosmopolitan” and transformed his “original rigid Hindooism,” to something that “has become as presentable a thing as its natural awkwardness permits it to be.”90 Many of the Amils,

From mixing much with the members of another faith ... become Dahri, or materialists, owning the existence of a Deity, but dissociating the idea from all revelation, and associating it with the eternity past and future of matter in its different modifications. A few are Atheists ... All these free-thinkers are formidable things.91

84 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 324.
85 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 325–326.
86 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 326.
87 Burton, Scinde or the Unhappy Valley, 1:120.
88 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 325.
89 Burton, Scinde or the Unhappy Valley, 1:237.
90 Burton, Scinde or the Unhappy Valley, 1:244.
91 Burton, Scinde or the Unhappy Valley, 1:244.
Burton thus allowed his disgust at the Bania and the Amil to be somewhat leavened by their seeming openness to modifying their faith in favour of a simplified and pluralistic outlook. Burton assumed that Sindhi Hindus practiced a more homogenised “Hinduism” in the past compared to their current, improved and simplified, heterogenous beliefs. The Sindhi Hindu’s religious world—or even the lack of it—is a tolerant, even progressive space. It is vastly different from the parade of repugnant characters we have seen Burton portray earlier, and is a world where difference is reconciled.

The epitome of the openness and inclusivity of this religious world is the *pothi*, an eclectic collection of sacred manuscripts. Although Burton was unable to resist throwing in a few disparaging remarks about the quality of writing in the Hindu *pothi* he tells us about the contents of the *pothi* in an almost lyrical manner, dividing his paragraphs as one would a poem.92 The *pothi* contains a poem in Persian on Krishna, an address to Ganesh, extracts from the Bhagavad Geeta in Persian and Punjabi, the Sukhmani of Nanak, and “a number of Madah, Panjara and Munajat to the different Pir’s, in Persian and Sindhi.” Prayers and hymns in Sanskrit, Persian, Punjabi, and Sindhi, resemble “those of the Moslems in style and ideas.”93 The *pothi* was a key to discerning the architecture of the religious culture of Sindh,94 a tapestry of interwoven threads. However, the significant plurality of religious practices Burton identified in Sindh did not mean the absence of caste-based oppression.

In writing on caste in Sindh, Burton commented that the weaver and leather worker were considered “low” (as they were in other parts of India) and that there were two “outcaste” tribes in Sindh, the Bale Shahi and the Shikari of the Thar.95 Both Muslims and Hindus practiced untouchability against them. The former could not be considered “pure Muslims”96 and the latter were “neither Moslems nor Hindus.”97 From Burton’s commentary, which would again need to be supplemented with further ethnographic and historical study, we

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can surmise two related phenomena: oppressed castes practiced plural traditions of their own and these traditions did not fit easily into the categories of upper caste practices that were “Hindu,” “Muslim,” or “Sufi.”

Burton’s predominant assessment of Sindhi religious practice focuses on what he identifies as its major religious tradition: Sufism. Boivin has shown how Burton, who devoted a chapter to Sufism in *Sindh and the Races*, was a key figure in producing what Boivin calls a “Sufi paradigm” for Sindh. After Burton, the Sindhi literati in colonial Sindh were often invested in expanding on this paradigm. A major method of identifying and producing the Sufi paradigm was literature. Burton “proved” that Sindhi literature existed whereas Europeans before him had claimed Sindh had none,98 and paid significant attention to Shah Abd al Latif’s Sufi work in Sindhi, the *Shah jo Risalo*. As Boivin has argued, the *Risalo* acquired canonical status and Sindhi litterateurs would represent the *Risalo*, in the years to come, both as the crowning glory of Sindhi literature as well as typical of Sindh’s Sufistic culture.99

Difference is not Boivin’s concern in examining Burton and the literati who followed him. But I propose that in designating Sindh as a unique space where Hindus let go of their (presumed) earlier more formalistic traditions, and characterising Sindh as a province rendered distinct by its own defining practices of “Sufism,” Burton again distinguished Sindh as a specific geography. Indeed, he claimed that Sufism was Sindh’s own “peculiar” “national faith.”100 In both distinguishing Sindh from India and contending that it had its own “national faith” of Sufism, Burton’s was an important legacy, often refracted by Sindhis themselves, if not in ways he might have envisaged.

**Sindhi Distinction and “Separatism” in Colonial India**

In his 1888 presidential address to the Sind Muhammadan Association,101 its president and founder, Hassan Ali Effendi,102 argued that the Bombay government acted unfavourably towards Sindh because it was “surrounded with so
many Hindoo Native States” and “the Bombay Governors on all sides by the Hindoo nation.” Effendi delivered his speech in the context of his opposition to Sindh’s continued attachment to Bombay, the government’s proposal to merge Sindh with Punjab, and the growing influence of Sindhi Hindus over land.103

In conversation with the work of Sarah Ansari, I will briefly provide a broad overview of the survival and evolution of the idea that Sindh was a region set apart from the rest of India. This idea was accompanied by the belief that Sindh was suffering under the yoke of exploitative others. It is not my intention here to draw a straight line from Burton to different historical contexts in colonial Sindh. Rather it is to emphasise the enduring strength of the idea of Sindh’s distinction, the earliest articulations of which can be found in sustained fashion in Burton’s works.

From the second half of the nineteenth century an emerging Sindhi regional elite advanced a territorial nativism that framed Sindh as a Muslim land increasingly destroyed by the parasitical Hindu from another, hostile geography that surrounded Sindh. The colonial state’s interventions that brought about changes in land ownership, and systems of revenue collection, leading often to rural indebtedness amongst both landlords and cultivators exacerbated these resentments. A section of Hindu Banias had become significant landlords.104 Although they did not control as much land as the British feared they did,105 nervous officials worried that Hindu traders and moneylenders would overtake the role of the powerful Muslim Waderas,106 and that this would cause social upheaval on a scale that would threaten their own hold over the province.107 As Manu Goswami argues, Hindu nationalists imagined the territorial entity of India, i.e., Bharat mata, with upper-caste Hindus conceived of as the “organic” “core nationals,” whereas Muslims were a “problematic particularity” or “the foreign body within the internal space of the nation.”108 But in colonial Sindh it was increasingly the Hindu, interchangeable with the threatening migrant outsider, who were the “problematic particularity.”

Burton’s assertions on the Sindhi “proper” as opposed to the migrant “Hindu” as well as his racialised descriptions of them are repeated in the first gazetteer of Sindh, published in 1874, over twenty years after Burton had published

103 “The Transfer of Sind,” Times of India, April 30, 1888: 5.
104 Cheesman, Landlord Power and Rural Indebtedness in Colonial Sind, 161–188.
105 Cheesman, Landlord Power and Rural Indebtedness, 118–188.
106 Wadero or Wadera is the title for a Muslim landowner with large holdings.
107 Cheesman, Landlord Power and Rural Indebtedness, 12–13; 52, 82–117; 118–188.
his impressions of Sindh. The gazetteer also had several references to the “laziness” of the Sindhis. Burton had deemed Sindhi labour “unenergetic” and suggested that the Company transport “a large body of hardy and vigorous labourers” to Sindh. E.H. Aitken, in his 1907 gazetteer, provided tables to show how many of the population of Sindh were “recruited from abroad.” Aitken too, distinguished between “native” Sindhis and foreigners. As Sarah Ansari points out, the British imported Punjabi labour for agricultural work, as they perceived Sindhi zamindars and Haris to be “lazy” and less skilled, in comparison to the “apparently more hard-working ... Punjabi.” The perception that “outsiders” were exploiting the province was rife by the late 1920s.

Migration to Sindh was by no means new, and had a long history, as it did in the rest of South and Southeast Asia. But migration backed by colonial policy based on British racial stereotypes of the “lazy native” and the “hard-working immigrant” where the “lazy native” could just as easily acquire the mantle of the exploited indigene created a unique set of problems. Recalling Burton’s schema of the migrant Hindu exploiting the Sindhis, Aitken argued that migrants “from the east and the west contended for dominion” over the “son of the soil.” The colonial state therefore brought migrant labourers to the province but was at the same time complicit in fueling resentment against them. Additionally, the presence of merchants and labour attracted to Karachi from other parts of the Bombay Presidency and elsewhere in India worsened antipathies against “outsiders.” Gujarati became the lingua franca of parts of the city during the inter-war period. Ansari notes that migrant Hindus and local Hindus coalesced from the Muslim point of view, and Sindhi Muslims began to identify Hindus with Bombay as opposed to Sindh. However, the migrant labour that travelled to Sindh was made up of a range of different castes and came from different regions. For instance, Karachi attracted Dalit

109 Hughes, A Gazetteer of the Province of Sind (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874).
110 Burton, Sindh and the Races, 42.
111 E.H. Aitken, Gazetteer of the Province of Sind (Karachi: Mercantile Steam Press, 1907), 156.
112 Aitken, Gazetteer of the Province of Sind, 179.
113 Cheesman points out that the so-called “laziness” of the Hari was probably a result of their insecurity of tenure: Landlord Power and Rural Indebtedness, 74–77.
114 Ansari, “Identity Politics and Nation-Building in Pakistan,” 103.
116 Aitken, Gazetteer of the Province of Sind, 155.
117 Aitken, Gazetteer of the Province of Sind, 386.
119 Ansari, Life After Partition, 34.
120 Ansari, “Identity Politics and Nation-building in Pakistan,” 104.
migrant labour from Kathiawar and as far afield as Andhra. Amongst these groups were people who may not have identified as Hindu.

The inter-war years were a period of heightened nationalist and communal consciousness in India. This was also the period when the movement to separate Sindh from the Bombay Presidency, which had its origins in the nineteenth century, achieved its peak. The communal solidarities forged during the years of the khilafat movement had broken down. The long-standing Sindhi movement for autonomy from the Bombay Presidency, which elite Hindus had initially supported, polarized along communal lines. British officials themselves continued to see Sindh as completely different to the rest of the Bombay Presidency, and constantly emphasised their perception of its difference. For instance, the 1921 Census of India commented that the Presidency formed “an unsatisfactory unit” since it included Sindh which was “distinct in every condition, climatic, racial, linguistic and sentimental.”

The question of Hindu belonging in Sindh arose in different contexts but was a matter of sustained debate during the inter-war years. When Bherumal Mahirchand Advani published his genealogy of the Amils in 1919 he provided some insight into how Amils and Bhaibands were ranking the “purity” and “originality” of their status depending on where they were supposed to have come from. Advani mentions that Amils are migrants and a composite “caste” of varied origins but that the date of the migration of various groups of Amils was lost to the mists of time. Advani stated, however, that the Khudabadi Amils, who considered themselves the most superior sort of Amil traced their “purity” to origins in Sindh, specifically to Khudabad. He also states that Khudabadi Bhaiband traders considered themselves above Bhaiband traders who originated from Gujarat and other areas. Advani’s work indicates that claiming origins in Sindh had become important to certain groups, especially the elite Amils and Bhaibands.

Some prominent Sindhi Hindus sought to emphasise their indigeneity by insisting that Sindh’s distinction lay in the fact that it was the source of Hindu

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123 Census of India (Bombay Presidency), 1921, vol. VIII, part I.
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...and Indian civilization and that it was from this civilization that they drew their ancient ancestry. These narratives drew on colonial historiography that framed Muslims as the outsiders. Meanwhile, Sindhi Muslim leaders emphasised Sindh’s separate geographical and cultural identity. The backdrop to the speeches and writings in the 1920s both claiming association to and dissociation from India were the ongoing excavations at the newly “discovered” Indus Valley site of Mohenjo-Daro. Principal S.C. Shahani argued that Mohenjo-Daro’s antiquities were proof of Hindu nativity in Sindh and that Sindh had birthed Hinduism in India, thereby situating Hindu Sindhi origins in both Sindh and India.125 But Shahani’s mentee, M.A. Khuhro,126 referred to the ongoing excavations at Mohenjo-Daro to support his argument that Sindh had always had a separate identity.127

Despite these evident shifts towards a more hermetically sealed communal identity over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, various literati had attempted, from the late nineteenth century onwards, to affirm a Sindhi “Sufi” culture of “unity” or universalism. The production of this literature survived the period of high communalism of the inter-war years. The intelligentsia behind this literature, as Boivin points out, were largely from religious minorities including the Agakhani Khoja Hashim Lalu, the Ithna Ashari Shia Mirza Qalich Beg, and the Amil Jethmal Parsram. For this literati, Sindh’s “difference” lay in the fact that its pluralistic practices accommodated rather than differentiated between minorities even as they privileged and located Sufism within aspects of their own religious traditions.128 Indeed, I suggest that the Sindhi literati arrived at their own versions of Sindh’s “difference” in developing what Boivin calls the “Sufi paradigm.” It is impossible to reduce their prolific corpus, even of only a single of these authors to a standardised reading. Nonetheless, they can all be said to have located Sindh and Sindhis’ “difference” in a certain universalism that was beyond normative understandings of religious identity. The audience for the Sindhi literati was educated Sindhis and the British but also clearly a colonial reading public outside of Sindh to whom their works were addressed in a pedagogical tone, explaining Sindh’s

125 “Principal S.C. Shahani’s Presidential Address at the Sind Hindu Educational Conference, Hyderabad, Sind,” April 10, 1925, Jayakar Papers, File No. 425, reel no. 61, 55–56, National Archives of India (NAI).
126 Personal email communication from Hamida Khuhro, September 24, 2014.
128 Boivin’s discussion of Mirza Qalich Beg is particularly interesting here: The Sufi Paradigm, 172–182.
culture to “outsiders” who might not understand that Sindh’s distinction lay in its “mystical” culture.\footnote{129}

Of the several Hindu Sindhis (most of whom were Amil) who wrote on Sufism, Jethmal Parsram was perhaps the most prominent in the period before partition. He used his position in the Theosophical Society to disseminate his Sufistic ideals.\footnote{130} In 1924, the Theosophical Society published Parsram’s \textit{Sind and its Sufis}, which stressed a primordial civilisational rootedness for Hindu Sindhis in both Sindh and India, even if they were migrants to Sindh. However, Parsram also sought to develop a theory of “the state of negation” of Sindh’s “Sufi culture” that challenged congealed originary narratives. For Parsram, “negation” meant a lack of both Muslim and Hindu orthodoxy, a culture that was “neither Ancient Indo-Aryan nor Arabian-Semitic,” but a “conglomerated.” Amil Brahmos had rejected the supremacy of Brahmin priests and Nanakpanthi \textit{bawas} and Parsram made the romantic claim that caste was almost absent in Sindh due to the weak status of the Brahmin. Parsram acknowledged that Sindh suffered from some great “social evils” but for him these were predominantly related to illiteracy rather than caste. A purported lack of caste was thus one way of representing Sindh as special due to its lack of religious conservatism.

Another reason Sindh was unique, according to Parsram, was that Sindh possessed a great advantage, “of which other places in India cannot boast, something which is priceless in its value, something of which the world, perhaps, is in sore need—mysticism. The mysticism of Sind is due chiefly to the condition of negation.” In Parsram’s worldview, India was the “mother” of Sindh and Sindh was a part of “beloved Hindustan.” Nonetheless, he distinguished Sindh from the rest of India because of its traditions of inter-connected religiosity. Parsram regretted that Sindh had fallen prey to “bigotry,” because of the colonial policy of divide and rule and “human nature” but insisted that this bigotry was mitigated by Sindh’s “union of religions.” The difference lay not in a distinction between “Sindhis” and “Hindus” but between Sindh and the rest of India, indeed \textit{the world}. According to Parsram, the world needed—but did not understand—Sindh’s Sufi mystic self.\footnote{131}

The challenges to the Sindhi literati’s idealised visions of Sufistic unity were most pronounced in the 1920s and came from reformist movements like the Arya Samaj and rival Tanzim and Tabligh movements. A communal riot

\footnote{129} A good example of this pedagogical approach is Jethmal Parsram’s \textit{Sind and its Sufis} (Adyar, Theosophical Publishing House, 1924), Indian Institute of Sindhology reprint, n.d.

\footnote{130} Boivin, \textit{The Sufi Paradigm}, 179–182.

\footnote{131} Parsram, \textit{Sind and its Sufis}, 1924.
erupted in Larkana in March 1927,\textsuperscript{132} when the Arya Samaj “reconverted”\textsuperscript{133} an oppressed caste “beggar woman” and her children.\textsuperscript{134} Significantly, the woman was a Gujarati migrant, possibly a migrant labourer, and not a “local,” illustrating how tensions could play out over a migrant and her children, in this case a very vulnerable one. The woman had a Muslim husband, and had converted to Islam, before becoming the target of the Arya Samaj.\textsuperscript{135}

It was in the communally charged month of the Larkana riot that the British government announced that it would appoint the Indian Statutory Commission (the Simon Commission) which would consider constitutional reform for India, including provincial reorganisation. The Simon Commission’s Report perhaps contained the most detailed official colonial account on Sindh’s detachment from the rest of the “predominantly” Hindu Bombay Presidency, reiterating a belief in Sindh’s “vastly different character” that the Commission thought was evident in both “the country and its people.”\textsuperscript{136} Noting that three-quarters of Sindh’s population were Muslim, the Commission distinguished Sindh’s difference not only from the rest of the Bombay Presidency, but from the rest of India, as Burton had done, commenting that in “its life and civilisation Sind is more closely allied to Iraq or Arabia than to India.”\textsuperscript{137} Consequently, the Commission framed Sindh as part of a different geography and a wider Islamic world separated from India.

Sindhi Muslim leaders demanded separation on a range of grounds, including a territorialised vision of Muslim belonging although they emphasised this not in terms of westward alliances with an Arab world but as a feature of Sindh’s unique identity. In his \textit{Story of the Sufferings of Sindh}, published in the same year as the Simon Report in 1930, Khuhro was at pains to “contrast” Sindh with India in terms of geography, climate, and clothing. He argued that Sindh had been a separate “province” since the time of Alexander.\textsuperscript{138} He

\textsuperscript{132} There had already been communal tensions reported in the wider district of Larkana where the Arya Samaj had opened offices. See for instance, “Alleged Desecration of Quran, Ratodero,” \textit{Times of India}, April 4, 1924: 8.

\textsuperscript{133} “Hindu-Muslim Clash, Riot at Larkana,” \textit{Times of India}, March 31, 1927: 11.

\textsuperscript{134} Home Department Special, File No. 143 143 K(b) 1928, Maharashtra State Archives (MSA).


\textsuperscript{138} M.A. Khuhro, “A Story of the Sufferings of Sind,” 1198.
referred to ancient Perso-Arabic histories and geographies of Sindh and India, to establish that historically India had either excluded Sindh, “and that both these countries stood aloof from each other” or that Sindh had ruled over India during certain periods. Khuhro cited the tenth-century geographer Ibn Hawqal who had made one of the first maps of Sindh and had called Sindh “the country of Islam,” distinguishing it from the countries of the east, i.e., of Hind.

While Sindh Muslim politicians were less overt about defining the province in communal terms, at a national level, the territorial importance of Sindh as a “Muslim-majority” province acquired enormous significance nationally for the League. Jinnah made the demand for separation part of his Delhi Proposals of 1927. At the core of the Proposals was the demand for Muslim territorial representation via the creation of three new Muslim-majority provinces in exchange for giving up separate electorates. Iqbal would go on to draw upon the Simon Commission’s framing of Sindh as more closely allied to Arabia rather than to India in his 1930 presidential address to the League, in which he made his famous demand for a “Muslim state” made up of Muslim-majority provinces. The Simon Commission, Khuhro, and Iqbal all drew upon colonial ethnographies that cast Sindh as the original land of Islam in the subcontinent. This was not to show Muslims as invaders, but to emphasise a territorial and cultural difference that would make debates on the separate status of Sindh a key part of all-India Muslim nationalism at this time. This framing simultaneously maintained the narrative of Muslims as “foreigners” to India (if not to Sindh) and Burton’s categorisation of non-Muslims as “outsiders” to the province, which was itself seen as distinct from the rest of India.

The economics of separating Sindh from Bombay were a major feature of the debates on provincial autonomy, but this larger conversation featured acrimonious disputes on questions such as how much land Banias controlled and Muslim “backwardness” in education and Hindu control over it. Inevitably, the question of who could be called a Sindhi crept into these exchanges in various guises. For instance, while Muslims demanded reservations of seventy per cent of teachers’ posts in public schools, the Hindus, loath to give up their privileges, asked if Sindhi Muslims considered themselves to have more in common

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with “outsider” Muslims and if non-Sindhis would come to the province to fill positions solely on the basis that they were Muslim. The theme of the threatening migrant persisted, even as the “outsider” changed depending on who perceived the threat.

The 1935 Government of India Act separated Sindh from the Bombay Presidency and Sindh’s first provincial government took office in 1937. The era of provincial autonomy witnessed governments that rose and fell as communal tensions continued to simmer. One of the problems the new provincial governments faced was that they needed to rely on Hindu support as “Muslim” parties were not able to form stable governments on their own. Debates in the new Sindh Assembly would reflect this tension. For instance, the League MLA Muhammad Hashim Gazdar expressed his anger over Hindu control of the public services, that, to his chagrin, the new dispensation would not challenge. He proposed communal ratios in the public services to ensure a Muslim majority. He also demanded that government investigate how many Amils held public posts and to enquire among government employees how many were Sindhi Muslims as opposed to non-Sindhi Muslims. Gazdar himself was a Sindhi-Marwari. He was born in Jaisalmer in 1895 and his father had migrated to Karachi, but this irony seems to have escaped him. Communal incidents such as the Masjid Manzilgah riots scarred the period between separation and partition. However, Hindu and Muslim politicians also made several attempts at coalition and compromise, that sometimes puzzled and angered the central leaderships of the Muslim League, the Congress, and the Mahasabha. These coalitions perhaps lent some credence to the claims of the arbiters of the “Sufi paradigm” that religious prejudice never completely succeeded in creating divides in Sindh.

143 “President’s Address,” The First Sindh Hindu Educational Conference, Hyderabad Sind, Jayakar Papers, File No. 425, reel no. 61, File No. 425, April 1925, National Archives of India; “Grievances of Sind Moslems, Govt. Accused of Partiality,” Times of India, December 22, 1924: 9.

144 Sind Legislative Assembly Proceedings (SLA Proceedings), August 5, 1947, Sindh Archives (SA).

145 SLA Proceedings, August 4–5 & August 9, 1937, SA.

146 Gazdar’s father was the first Muslim from Sindh to get a degree in engineering: “In Memoriam, Remembering Hashim Gazdar,” Dawn, February 26, 2011.

The attempts at defining who belonged to the province and had a claim on its resources would find their greatest expression in 1947. Burton had, in his time, emphasized the existence of a distinct “Sindhi” race attached to the territory of Sindh. By the time of partition, Sindhi nationalists had started to define belonging in terms of what would now be called “ethnicity” rather than religion. Faced with the departure of its economically significant minorities, in the context of the province facing several new challenges after the arrival of refugees from India, the Sindh government enacted legislation to prevent them emigrating which included powers to arrest those trying to evacuate. The attempts to retain Sindh’s minorities infuriated incoming refugees. But Ansari has shown how quickly the Sindhi leadership began to feel that “outsiders” with distinct cultures and languages were overtaking “their” province. They came to believe that the Pakistan government and the Urdu and Punjabi speaking Indian Muslims had linguistically, economically, politically, and demographically overwhelmed the Sindhis. A comparison of the 1941 and 1951 censuses shows that in 1941 Sindhi was the “mother tongue” of 61.2% of the population in Karachi, whereas in 1951 it was a mere 8.6%. Old “demographic anxieties” about “non-Sindhis” controlling the province arose again, except they now took on another form. The retention of non-Muslim Sindhis in the province both as economic and cultural subjects became vital as Sindhis chafed at the new Pakistan government’s dominance. The remaining Hindus in Sindh and Sindhi Muslims joined forces in proclaiming that the Pakistan government was making Sindhis refugees in their own city, and in their own province. The shift to affirming an “ethnic” identity in Sindh, as opposed to a religious identity as partition’s demographic challenges became clearer, invite comparisons with the Indian state of Assam at the opposite end of the subcontinent.

The beginning and the end of colonial rule in Sindh were bookended by narratives on the Sindhi vs. the “non-Sindhi”. The meanings of these categories shifted, based on “race,” religion, “ethnicity,” and language. The Sindhi Hindus who were the exploitative foreigners in Burton’s books are now the lost sons of the soil replaced by the non-Sindhi muhajirs or the “new Sindhis.” In some histories, written and oral, both Sindhi Muslims and Hindus blame the

148 This included punitive action to force the non-Muslim oppressed castes to stay behind.
departure of the minorities at partition on the new “outsiders.” The Karachi riots of 6 January 1948 when Muslim refugees attacked a convoy of Sikhs leaving for India play a central role in these narratives. However, while the arrival of refugees in the province and the Karachi riots certainly had a role to play in hastening the departure of Sindh’s minorities, many had already left, and many had already planned to leave.\textsuperscript{152} This was despite Governor Mudie’s conviction that the “real Sindhi Hindus” would not leave and that it was impossible for anything to “happen” in Sindh,\textsuperscript{153} revealing the underlying threads of contradiction that had run through Sindh’s colonial past: it was a province divided by difference yet simultaneously one which remained “peaceful.”

Some Sindhis tried to resist partition and later the hegemony of Pakistan over Sindh by invoking a peaceful “Sufi” past. In May 1947, as it was becoming clear that partition would take place and the status of the Hindus in the province was significantly threatened, Jethmal Parsram, the renowned Sindhi author and advocate of Sindhi Sufism, accused the League and the Congress together of “mortgaging” the rights of Sindhi Muslims and Hindus to “non-Sindhi interests” and asked Sindhis to be left alone to resolve their problems.\textsuperscript{154} Once Pakistan was formed, G.M. Syed, who had introduced the Pakistan Resolution in the Sindh Assembly in 1943,\textsuperscript{155} very quickly grew disenchanted with his new nation. Syed summoned the religion of Sindh, which Burton had named Sufism, in his opposition to Pakistan, even if Sufism had failed to bridge the chasm of partition.\textsuperscript{156} He became one of the key proponents of a Sindhi nationalist discourse imbued with nostalgia for a heterogenous Sufi past, which was shared with Sindhi Hindus.\textsuperscript{157} Syed designated the Hindu king Raja Dahir as one of the heroes of Sindh, fashioning Dahir as the indigenous challenger to invading Arab “imperialists” who did not follow “true” Islam but imposed their intolerant religion on tolerant Sindh. Syed refuted the contention of colonial historiography that Arab expeditions brought Islam to Sindh, insisting that Sindhi Islam was the legacy of Muslims and Sufis of

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\textsuperscript{152} Shahani, “Sind and the Partition of India.”
\textsuperscript{153} Zamindar, The Long Partition, 48.
\textsuperscript{154} Jethmal Parsram, “Sind Betrayed!,” Memorandum to Kripalani and Patel, May 6, 1947, AICC (1st), G-57/1946, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, India.
\textsuperscript{155} SLA Proceedings, March 3, 1943, SA.
\textsuperscript{156} Boivin, The Sufi Paradigm, 300.
\textsuperscript{157} G.M. Syed, Sindhu Desh: A Study in Separate Identity through the Ages (Karachi, G.M. Syed Academy, n.d.), 318–328.
\end{flushleft}
“other” and “previous” religions.\textsuperscript{158} For Syed, Pakistan was reminiscent of the marauding Arabs.\textsuperscript{159}

Sindh’s Sufism has become totemic of postcolonial Sindhi nationalism articulated against a non-Sindhi Muslim and Urdu speaking Pakistani Muslim nationalist narrative.\textsuperscript{160} This Sufi identity is both paradoxically inclusive and exclusive: it is touted as being uniquely accommodating of religious minorities while at the same time it is used to differentiate Sindhis from migrants to the province.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In conclusion I would like to pose some questions on difference and religious belonging in the subcontinent. Burton had emphasised a difference between the Muslim Sindhis “proper” and Sindhi Hindus. Contrarily, his narratives also created Sindh, a region where populations “were neither Muslim nor Hindu,” as the space \textit{par excellence} of the negation of religious categories, an account that survived in postcolonial Sindhi nationalist discourse albeit as part of an exclusionary nationalist vision. Scholars of religious change in colonial India have focused on how the encounter with colonialism, particularly its enumerative modalities such as the census,\textsuperscript{161} and the emergence of nineteenth-century reform movements produced more uniform, “modern” religious traditions, flattening the variations of the pre-colonial period. But postcolonial South Asia has posed challenges to Sindhi communities, not only in terms of a binary Hindu-Muslim divide but to “Hindus” and “Muslims,” whose practices sit uneasily on the edges of mainstream religious, cultural, and political narratives of the nation, as other Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim groups have attacked their sites of worship.\textsuperscript{162}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{158} Syed, \textit{Sindhu Desh}, 63.
\item \textsuperscript{159} On the revival of Sufism in postcolonial Pakistan by Sindhi separatists, see Oskar Verkaaik, “Reforming Mysticism: Sindhi Separatist Intellectuals in Pakistan,” \textit{International Review of Social History} 49 (2004): 65–86.
\item \textsuperscript{160} This vision has not always been unchallenged. Julien Levesque, “‘Sindhis are Sufi by Nature’: Sufism as a Marker of Identity in Sindh,” in \textit{Islam, Sufism and Everyday Politics of Belonging in South Asia}, eds. Deepra Dandekar and Torsten Tschacher (London: Routledge, 2016), 212–217.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Syed Raza Hassan, “Suicide Attack on Pakistani Shrine Kills 72, Claimed by Islamic State,” \textit{Reuters}, February 16, 2017; Khalsa Press, “Controversy Erupts at Chellaram’s Sindhi
There were clearly breaks in colonial epistemological categories—breaks that have precariously survived as the liminality of Sindhi communities in both India—where Sindhis do not belong to a territorially defined ethnic or linguistic state—and Pakistan demonstrate. More needs to be done to investigate what this means for South Asia where majoritarian forms of religious nationalism have increasingly sought to make religious, territorial, and political authority “congruent.”163 Despite the vast volume of historiographical scholarship on the 1947 partition when populations were rapidly “unmixed,”164 historians have not paid sufficient attention to the materiality of religion during the process of partition. Various dramatis personae of the time extended the idea that Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities could not co-exist, marking partition as a religious event, yet the actual stuff of religious practice and thought remains the elephant in the room in political histories of partition. Did “mixed communities” like the Sindhis transgress or even configure the political boundaries of “community” and religiously demarcated geographies, even as these categories become ever more sealed in India and Pakistan? Did these communities pose alternative histories of religious modernity165 in colonial India and at partition when they were separated? If so, what does this mean for the modern nation-states of India and Pakistan?

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