

# Sind Through The Centuries

## A Retrospect

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For some years before 1975 the scholars and historians most deeply concerned with Sind had been feeling the need to organize a Conference or Seminar for the purpose of "Stock-taking of the entire store-house of knowledge on Sind". A quarter century had passed since independence of the country and the establishment of the Muslim State of Pakistan. With the creation of Pakistan, Sind, the oldest Muslim region within the subcontinent, the land of Sufis and saints and of the ancient erudite Sindhi Language, had been pitchforked into the maelstrom of partition and its attendant problems of mass migration, law and order and immense economic difficulties. Sind had to undertake the burden of the Central Government of Pakistan financially, as well as to house it physically in its own capital of Karachi. It had to provide immediate relief for the hundreds of thousands of refugees and to eventually resettle them permanently. Its resources were strained to the limit but it managed to cope with the demands made on it. The stress of the new situation in the post-partition period was felt at all levels of the society and it is a measure of the maturity of this society that it has withstood the onslaught retaining intact its distinct culture and personality.

Keeping in mind the changes that have taken place in the twentieth century in this part of the world and also the major break-through in knowledge about the post-civilization in Sind that has been achieved through the excavation of Moen-jo-Daro and other related sites in Sind and its neighbouring countries, as well as the research that has been carried on relating to Sind in different academic centres of the world, it was widely felt that the time was

ripe for an International Conference which would bring together the scholars on the subject and allow an assessment of work done on Sind, allow an exchange of ideas and stimulate further work in the field. The Government of Sind with the support of the Federal Government of Pakistan, enthusiastically undertook the organization of the Conference and the Seminar entitled 'Sind Through the Centuries' held its deliberations in Karachi, the Capital of the Province of Sind from the second to the seventh of March, 1975.

The Seminar which was inaugurated by the President of Pakistan was extremely successful. Eminent scholars from U.K., U.S.A., the Soviet Union, Sri Lanka, the Federal Republic of Germany, Holland, France, Italy, Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria, among others attended the Conference.

A great number of excellent papers were read which illuminated the hitherto dark corners of history. A number of interesting discussions were generated by the papers and some controversial points were raised.

The delegates did not spend all time in the conference chamber. They were given a chance to see some of the historical and archaeological sites that had been the subject of their researches and writings. The consensus of the participants was that the Conference had proved extremely useful.

The organisers of the conference felt that the scholarly papers read at the conference should be published in a book form so that they should become available to students and scholars throughout the world. In the first place Oxford University Press was entrusted with the task of publishing a selection of the papers read at the Seminar. Due to a number of considerations among them financial, the present volume contains a comparatively small number of papers of the total presented. An attempt has been made to give a representative cross section of topics which formed the subject of discussion at the conference. It is hoped that additional volumes will also be published in due course to cover the remaining proceedings of the conference.

Sind is an ancient civilization—one of the oldest in the world. Contemporary of Sumer and Akkad in the land of Mesopotamia, it is a corner of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent where the ancient Sindhi had created a powerful culture which centred Moen-jo-Daro in upper Sind and its periphery extended north to Kashmir and south to Gujerat. A highly sophisticated urban system existed with a flourishing trade with its contemporary civilization in Mesopotamia and even further afield. This civilization had flowered approximately two thousand years before the Aryan invasions into northern India with its primitive tribal and pastoral culture. Thus does the panorama of Sind's history spread out before us fading into the mists of history, the only tangible reminders of which are the archaeological remains still with us.

Sind has been described by one notable historian as a backwater of Indian history and by another famous writer and 'orientalist' as "the unhappy valley". These are, however, superficial judgements. For although Sind may not have been in the mainstream of the Indian history which had its source and seat of power at Delhi, it was very much the hub and the axis of its own history which formed a distinctive stream of Indian history. The emergence of the great Indus civilization about the middle of the third millenium B.C. may fairly be adopted as a starting point of the history of Sind. Moen-jo-Daro, a great city based its prosperity on a rich agricultural region watered by the mighty Sindhu on whose bank the city stood. This was the source, the home, of one of the earliest civilizations of man.

Rather than a backwater Sind has participated in the main events of history in South Asia. It has a prominent role in the Aryan folk history epic of Mahabharata. The King of Sindhu Sauvira, a powerful potentate Jayadratha, was responsible for the abduction of the Pandava queen Draupadi and subsequently was a strong ally of the Kaurayas in the legendary war in which surrounded by a bodyguard of 'five hundred brave mountaineers' (presumably the ancestors of the modern Baluch) with this banner depicting a wild boar, he was killed in battle by Arjuna. Jayadratha ruled over an extensive kingdom which extended over Sauvira, Sivi, Sindhu and other regions which he had brought under his sway by conquest.

The earliest recorded histories of the subcontinent of India are those of Sind. *Chachnama*, the earliest written history records the conquest of the Muslim Arabs in 711 A.D. and gives an account of the preceding Brahmin house of Chach as well as the Buddhist Rai dynasty which Chach displaced. Earlier references to the history of Sind occur in Greek histories of Herodotus, Hecateus and Arrian. Here we find "the first date in Sind History which can be fixed within narrow limits" i.e. that of its annexation to the Persian empire in the reign of Darius Hystaspes, the Achaemenian ruler of Persia, circa 519 or 518 B.C. The twentieth satrapy of the Persian empire Sindhu was extremely prosperous and its revenues and population far exceeded those of any other satrapy of the Persian empire. Herodotus writes:

"The Indians, who are more numerous than any other nation with which we are acquainted, paid a tribute exceeding that of every other people to wit, three hundred and sixty talents of gold dust. This was the twentieth satrapy".

The Greeks believed that there was no human habitation beyond the great Thar desert: "Eastward of India is a tract which is entirely sand. Indeed of all the inhabitants of Asia, concerning whom anything certain is known, the Indians dwell the nearest to the east, and the rising of the sun. Beyond them the whole country is desert on account of the sand.

A contingent of Sindhi soldier fought in the army of Xerxes during the invasion of Greece. Sindhis also fought in the last battle of the Persian empire against Alexander at Arbela where they provided men and elephants. The Achaemenian empire fell before Alexander in spite of Sindhi support and subsequently in their own country Sindhis offered fierce resistance to the Greek invader. Alexander reports that the land of Musicanus in the north of Sind was the most prosperous region in India.

Following the meteoric invasion of Alexander Sind experienced various vicissitudes of fortune. It was subjugated by the Greeks, then by Chandragupta Maurya. It was a part of Asoka's domain when it became Buddhist. It was also part of the kingdom of the

great Kushan ruler Kanishka. Kanishka was a Mahayana Buddhist and he strengthened the Buddhist tradition in Sind. In 4th & 5th centuries A.D. White Huns established their dominion and this period saw the beginning of the reintroduction of Brahminism. By the middle of the third century A.D. Sind passed under Persian hegemony for the second time in the Sassanid empire. During the sixth century A.D. Sind became independent once again and remained so under the Rais and the succeeding Brahmins until its annexation by the Arab Muslim dynasty of Ommayyeds.

It will have become clear from the above outline of Sind's history that Sind has acted as a watershed of the two powerful streams of West Asian (or Middle Eastern) and South Asian history. In many cases the upper reaches of the Indus Valley and the plains of the Punjab have remained untouched when Sind and Baluchistan have been part and parcel of the great periods of west Asian history. Thus from the earliest times Sind has had connections with the Mesopotamian Civilization, contacts which were renewed strongly after the Muslim conquest. Similarly it has had the close links with Iran in the great periods of that country's history under the Achaemenians and Sassanids. Sind armies have gone as far as Greek shores. Alexander navies have sailed down the Sindhu and Alexander is the legendary founder of the fort of Sehwan. On the other hand Sind has participated equally in the great moments of the history of India. It has a prominent role in the epic of Mahabharata, nonetheless heroic even though on the losing side. It was part of the empire of the great Asoka and was devoutly Buddhist in the Buddhist phase of Indian history. It avoided a full scale revival of Brahminism through the accedint of the Muslim Arab conquest. Subsequently in the Muslim period of Indian history Sind shared in the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazna who came to destroy the Qarmati heretics and then after a long and glorious period of independence under the Soomras and the Sammas came into the fold of the empire of Akbar. Although in trying to conquer Sind *Khan-i-Khanan* was defeated thus losing his great reputation; subsequently Sind was added to the Mughal Empire by treaty. Thus during the height of Mughal power Sind was part of the empire asserting its independence again after the death of Aurangzeb. It once again became independent in the early 18th century under the

Kalhoras and apart from a glimpse of Nadir Shah remained untouched by the convulsions of Indian history until late in their chronology of conquests, and in view of its strategic importance *vis a vis* the expansion of the Russian empire south into Central Asia the British conquered Sind in 1843 from the Talpurs.

If the British had not come to India perhaps they would have had to be invented. For it was the British period which in spite of the evil concomitants of alien rule, dragged the subcontinent willy-nilly into the modern post-industrial-revolutionary age. The hundred years of British rule were truly revolutionary for the people of Sind. The declining mediaevalism of the 18th century was suddenly halted and an entirely new direction was given to the process of history by the introduction of British civil and revenue codes, the new system of education, the introduction of railways, a new road system, trading patterns, harbours and budding new political system. For the first time newspapers were printed and published and the process of modernization and politicization of the people began. The politics of association were introduced. The British remained a brief hundred years in Sind and a mere 200 hundred years in Hindustan, since the battle of Plassey, but in that short period there was an intensification of progress and change in Indian society, the most important and enduring aspect of which was the emergence of a large educated middle class which became the instrument of further and permanent change in the society. The middle class consisted of a vast variety of skills including lawyers, doctors, teachers, merchants and industrial managers and workers.

The new educated professional middle classes were steeped in the political traditions of British political thinkers, J. S. Mill, Bentham, and others and were familiar with the representative principles involved in American war of Independence and the evolution of the political process since then. They watched with interest the passage of the Reform Bills in the British parliament enfranchising more and more of the general public and they advocated the same system for India. The British rulers were forced to respond to this demand and gradually at first advisory bodies were set up with nominated members and gradually the principles of representation through election and finally full provincial autonomy was

granted with some reservations in the interests of imperial security. From mid-19th century to mid 20th-century the people of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent were irrevocably politicized in the western democratic tradition and the middle class grew in numbers and strength. It was this pervasiveness of the middle class that provided a strong base for the successful introduction of the technological revolution. Because of the middle class educated in English or even in the vernacular along the western pattern of education it was possible for the subcontinent to absorb the immense trauma of industrialization—a trauma which has caused turmoil and resulted in extreme solutions in countries as sophisticated as China and Iran merely because they lacked the cushioning effect of a progressive middle class. Sind participated fully in the new education.

This rich and varied historical background helped to produce unique civilization in Sind, the chief characteristics of which were a religion, eclecticism and strong Sufi tradition of Mysticism and tolerance. It also produced glorious Sufi poetry going back to Mamui Fakirs of the Samma period (circa 14th–15th centuries). The golden age of Sufi poetry in Sind is 17th–18th centuries with Shah Abdul Latif's poetry as the high point of this period. Shah Abdul Latif is undoubtedly among the front ranking mystic poets of the world and can be compared to Jalaluddin Rumi in the profundity of its thought and beauty of his language. The Risalo could fairly claim to being the Quran in Sindhi as the mathnavi is regarded as the Quran in Persian.

Shah Latif's poetry is also witness to the richness and beauty of the Sindhi language. The flexibility and comprehensiveness of Sindhi is living proof of the rich pattern of Sind's history. Although Sindhi derives from the same roots as the other major Indian languages, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic etc., the influence of these languages is retained in a purer form than in the other Indian languages. Similarly in architecture the two streams of influence, the Hindu tradition from Rajasthan in lower Sind and the Persian influence throughout Sind retain their original flavour less diluted than the architecture elsewhere in India. Thus the tombs at the Makli Hills (Thatta) which belong to the Samma period show the

distinct Hindu style of Rajasthan, the Chaukundi tombs (Karachi) and similar tombs in Sonda show a Sindhi adaptation of the style and the Shahjahan Mosque at Thatta is very close to the Friday mosque in Ispahan.

The beautiful tombs of the Kalhora period (18th century A.D.) show distinct Persian influence in the blue and white tile decoration, but the exuberance of design and the modification in the style show the emergence of a unique Sindhi style of architecture.

A remarkable feature of the architecture of Sind has been that consistently through its history most notable achievements have been such as have benefited the public rather than glorify monarchs. Thus one of the most striking features of Moen-jo-Daro and the other Indus Valley cities is the civil drainage system which serves every house in the city. The drainage system devised by civil engineers five thousand years ago is in working condition even today.

The other unique feature of architecture in Sind has also been that of domestic nature. The normal feature of houses in lower Sind has been *Mangh* or wind catcher set in the flat roof of the house facing the direction of the breeze in the summer and providing natural air conditioning of the homes by filtering the air through this roof tunnel.

These domestic conveniences for the ordinary people are as valuable a contribution to the sum of human achievement as any beautiful mosque or tomb could have been and it shows the essential humanity of the society in Sind while at the same time the aesthetic and the sheer excellence of the architecture in Sind is second to none. The skill of the stone masons who have carved the stupas of the Buddhist period are among the finest in the subcontinent as Professor van Louhzen points out in her paper. Similarly excellent are the bas-relief carving in Samma tombs of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Later still the carvings of Quranic passages in the Shahjahan Mosque at Thatta are comparable to the work that has been done at the great Mosque of Cordova. The great artists of stonework and brickwork were not few. In fact they existed in such numbers that Ghulam Shah Kalhoro was able to

complete his great fort at Hyderabad within a few months. The forts at Hyderabad, at Ranikot and Kot Diji are extant and are proof of the brilliant military skills of the Sindhi people. Kot Diji, the best preserved of these forts, could be compared with the work of Vauban, the early 18th century French military tactician.

Sindhis have on the whole been a peaceful people but notable warriors nonetheless. They have fought to retain their independence as proved by some famous incidents of history. Sultan Mohammed Tughlaq and Khan-i-Khanan are only two of a long line of conquerors worsted in the deserts and plains of Sind.

By the 18th century, therefore, the modern pre-industrial age civilization of Sind was in full flower. Sind had a rich developed language, a distinct architectural style, the capital city of Hyderabad had replaced the mediaeval capital of Thatta. Shikarpur in upper Sind was a trading emporium of central and south Asia and the first independent Sindhi dynasty since the sixteenth century was reigning. The end of the 18th century saw the Talpurs replace the Kalhoras but the culture and the prosperity continued through their reign. It was this halcyon age of culture, peace and isolation that was shattered by the British conquest and all the implication that had for the ancient ways of the country.

With the advent of the British a new era of technology and sea power came to the subcontinent. Occupying an important sea coast nearest to Europe and in strategic proximity to the important Suez route, Sind now assumed a new significance for the British Imperial strategists.

The importance of the Port of Karachi was recognized as being gateway not only to north West India but to Afghanistan, and regions beyond.

The replacement of the land by the sea as the major means of communication gave Sind with its long coastline and natural harbour a great importance in the new scheme of things. Its potential as a trade route for the northern regions was recognized as also its importance for the defence of the subcontinent. The flat plains of the hinterland were particularly favourable for establishing a network of railways north west to Peshawar, north east to Lahore and Delhi, east to Quetta and west to Rajasthan. Sind was to become the

pivot of the defence of this region as was realized early during the 'Mutiny' years 1857 and 1858 when in spite of incomplete roads and railways it was the quickest route of supply to the north of India from Europe. Subsequently in the two world wars Karachi was a major air and sea port in the defence system of the British Empire.

In fact the twentieth century with its revolution in communications made the coast of Sind and its fertile hinterland a region with tremendous potential for development and this potential was realized with the establishment of the independent state of Pakistan. Carved out of the subcontinent of Hindustan as a separate homeland for Muslims, Pakistan was yet the revival of the ancient cultural and political entity based on the Indus river and its tributaries. It could be regarded as the twentieth century re-incarnation of the Indus valley civilization or the empire of the great Kanishka.

Sind, the gateway of Islam in the subcontinent, occupies pride of place in Pakistan. True to their tradition of hospitality and their religion of peace the Sindhis welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees from the strife torn provinces of India and settled them in their midst in the towns and villages of Sind. The partition of India and its aftermath meant a great upheaval in the traditional pattern of life in Sind. Rapid industrialization took place in the urban areas of Sind and consequently migration from different regions of Pakistan into the industrialized areas of Sind has been continuous since independence. As a result the demographic pattern of Sind is undergoing a fundamental change. Sind has in the past absorbed many floods of immigration and has successfully absorbed them enriching her culture and language in the process. At mid-twentieth century Sind had stood self-sufficient and mature with a proud cultural tradition, with an ancient language yet developed enough to adapt itself to requirements of the modern age, and resources of agriculture and industry which could render it a prosperous land. It is as yet too early to see how well these promises of development and prosperity have been fulfilled and what kind of changes have been wrought in the body politic in the three decades since 1947. The challenge of the twentieth century has been tremendous indeed; it will have to be seen how this land with 5000 years of history responds to it.