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Exploring Pluriverse: A Decolonial Examination of the Pakistan Independence Movement through Hamza Alavi's Works

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Abstract: *This study offers a decolonial study of Hamza Alavi's discernment on the Pakistan independence movement in the theoretical framework of decoloniality by Walter Mignolo. It endeavors to unearth indigenous intellection of the post-colonial Pakistan that confronts the hegemonic knowledge claims that tends to essentialize the Pakistan independence movement. This research intends to explore the ductile pluriversality of narratives and border thinking versus the inflexible concept of a single ideology based on religion as the driving force of the Pakistan independence movement. The significance of this study lies in bringing forward literary decoloniality by promoting critical thinking from post-colonial Pakistan. Mignolo's concepts of pluriversality and border thinking provide a theoretical lens through which to interpret Alavi's notion of Pakistan's independence movement in the contemporary era. By deploying an interdisciplinary approach encompassing perspectives from politics, history, and cultural studies, this research explores deeper, covert layers of multifarious factors that accelerated the partition of the subcontinent, leading to Pakistan's independence.*

Key Words: Decoloniality, Pluriversality, Border Thinking, Intellectual Hegemony, Decolonial Thought

Introduction and Background to Study

Literary theory is intrinsically multidisciplinary, encapsulating standpoints from sociology, history, politics, psychology, philosophy and literature. This feature of literary theory is inclusive for sturdy analysis of texts and for an interpretation characterized by the broader social and political conditions in which the text is entrenched. This confluence of multi-disciplines allows literary theory to encompass literature not as an artistic expression but as a critique and reflection of historical events and political ideologies. This confluence is evident in the study of the Pakistani independence movement, where literary theory intersects with political theory to uncover the underlying motives and alliances that shaped the formation of the state. The place of theory in literary disciplines marks the institutional evolution of 'Theory' from theory, as Gupta (2009) informs, "theory is the institutional extrapolation from a dynamic and contingent process of thinking about literature and criticism" (p.110). This shift in the scope of literary theory and English literature is pertinent to the infiltration of interdisciplinary studies that the emergence of various literary schools of thought has institutionalized.

With this shift, literary theory is open to multifarious debates from politics, culture, history, psychology, and other relevant disciplines, specifically in a post-colonial epoch. Postcolonialism is an era that is believed to be followed by decolonization and a series of historical events of the physical liberation of British and French colonies in South Asia and Africa. (Iqbal & Abbas, 2022). The decolonization of territories is often accompanied by the imperative to decolonize minds. This intellectual liberation can be achieved through a decolonial epistemology, which promotes the freedom of critical thought. To effectively counter intellectual hegemony, it is essential to embrace a plurality of narratives. On that score, when minds are still to be liberated, decoloniality is an approach that is inclusive and ready to embrace diverse

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perspectives by underscoring hegemonic narratives, either national or imperialistic. Therefore, this study engages Alavi's examination of the independence movement of Pakistan, traditionally deciphered through the ideological lens centred on the unity of the Muslim community. This research re-examines and re-contextualizes those crucial events, alliances and motives that are overt and not stated clearly. For this, this research engages Alavi's insights on the subcontinent's partition by deploying a decolonial lens crafted by Walter Mignolo. This re-reading of significant milestones of the partition challenges those predominant narratives that are established by both the dominant national narratives and former colonial powers in a post-colonial epoch.

Hamza Alavi's work provides a critical re-evaluation of the events leading to the partition, focusing on the often-overlooked social dynamics and strategic alliances among different Muslim classes. Alavi's proposition is that the independence movement was not driven by a monolithic ideology of Muslim unity but at the junction of the pragmatic alliances of various social strata. This perspective is in accord with Walter Mignolo's decolonial framework, particularly his concepts of border thinking and universality. Border thinking, as proposed by Mignolo ([2014](#)), highlights the epistemic perspective from the margins or borders, challenging the hegemonic knowledge structures imposed by colonial and neo-colonial powers. Pluriversality, on the other hand, promotes the recognition and coexistence of multiple worldviews and rationalities, rejecting the singular, universal narratives often propagated by dominant power structures.

Research Questions

1. Did the Pakistani movement entrenched only in a monolithic ideology of Muslim unity or there were other overt factors that accelerated the movement?
2. Is there any possibility of thinking beyond the simplistic dichotomy of ideological unity versus colonial resistance behind the independence movement of Pakistan?

Research Objectives

The research aims to achieve two main objectives: firstly, to scrutinize and re-read the existing narratives surrounding the partition by emphasizing the diverse social pragmatic-based alliances, as elucidated by Alavi; and secondly, to integrate Mignolo's decolonial theoretical framework to present fresh insights that centres on border thinking and pluriversality. This study also aims to decolonize epistemology from the hegemonic intellectual imperialism that keeps directing indigenous critical thinking in a post-colonial epoch.

Significance of the Study

This research contributes to re-evaluating critical historical milestones in the independence movement of Pakistan, offering fresh insights by imparting voice to facts and narratives that have been overlooked or marginalized in mainstream historiography. By engaging a decolonial perspective, this study aims to unearth the diverse motivations and strategies that shaped the movement, thus enhancing the historical and political discourse with a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the era. The research also focuses on the significance of decolonial theory in reassessing historical events, thereby prompting scholars to adopt similar approaches in other post-colonial contexts. The study re-evaluates the Pakistani independence movement through the perspectives of Hamza Alavi's critical analysis in the theoretical framework of Walter Mignolo's decolonial theory. It engages in a dialogue between the singular narratives of ideology and unity with various other factors, revealing the practical alliances and diverse motives that were pivotal in the partition. This study not only enriches the historiography of Pakistan's independence but also underscores the importance of decolonial thought in comprehending the intricate dynamics of post-colonial societies.

Literature Review

The section reviews the literature relevant to the major themes of this study, including nationalism and the growth of nationalism in the subcontinent, ideologies, post-colonial conditions that are marked by persisting coloniality in the form of discourse, and decoloniality. Celano ([2003](#)) writes, "Colonial discourse was meticulously crafted to highlight and exacerbate communal differences, thus legitimizing the British presence as necessary for maintaining order" (p. 145). This narrative not only facilitated colonial

dominance but also laid the groundwork for the communal tensions that ultimately resulted in the partition. Celano's analysis offers crucial insights into how colonial discourse impacted nationalist movements and played a role in the eventual formation of Pakistan. Anderson's (1983) seminal work, *Imagined Communities,* is remarkable in understanding the popularity of nationalism in various parts of the world. He puts forward that nations are imagined communities, socially constructed through shared language, media, and symbols. He asserts, "It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny" (p.12). However, in the context of the Indian subcontinent, the rise of nationalism does not follow a Eurocentric model of nationalism that encompasses European nations and nationhood. Be that as it may, Alavi (1989) places the Pakistani post-colonial condition in the framework of Anderson's theory and tests its validity if it applies to a condition different from that in Europe. To check the incommensurability, Alavi (1989) maintains:

Whereas in Europe, nations were constituted into states, in post-colonial societies, the problem is inverted: to transform states into nations...a national identity that is not spontaneously generated from below but is imposed from above by those at the heart of the power structure in the country... (p. 1527)

Ahmad (1997) provides a critical perspective on the partition and its aftermath, highlighting the impact of power dynamics and the exploitation of religious identities. He observes, "The partition was less a consequence of communal hatred than of political manoeuvring by elites who saw in the division an opportunity to secure their power" (Ahmad, 1997, p.51). His analysis underscores the pragmatic alliances and the multiplicity of motives that characterized the independence movement, which is in line with Alavi's arguments.

Ahmad (1992) is another notable indigenous theorist whose analysis of Pakistani post-colonial condition is relevant. His analysis of nationalism and post-colonial states provides with original perspective. He suggests that nationalist movements, initially inclusive alliances, often transform into exclusive ideologies after gaining power. He notes, "The dreams of anti-colonial liberation gave way to the realities of post-colonial state power, often replicating the very hierarchies they sought to dismantle" (Ahmad, 1992, p.34).

Mignolo (2021) introduces the concept of decoloniality as a way to address the perpetual process of coloniality by shifting away from Eurocentric knowledge systems and advocating for the reconstruction of indigenous epistemologies. While decoloniality critiques the negative aspects of modernity, the current capitalist system, and global dominance to address the enduring issue of the coloniality of power, decolonization itself primarily focuses on the nation-state formations that arose from political and economic anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa. To challenge and transcend Western knowledge claims within the colonial matrix of power, decoloniality also addresses the decolonization of epistemology; since colonialism encroaches on native lands, it also disrupts local ways of knowing. Mignolo's theoretical framework of decoloniality is pivotal in re-evaluating the partition and the independence movement. Border thinking, as Mignolo posits, involves highlighting historical events from the margins, thus allowing for a more subtle understanding of the diverse motivations and strategies of various social classes. He writes, "Decoloniality opens up the space for border thinking, a form of thinking from the perspective of those who have been marginalized by modernity and coloniality" (Mignolo, 2011, p.33). This perspective allows for a more layered understanding of the independence movement, acknowledging the diverse motivations and strategies of various social classes. Pluriversality, the recognition of multiple, coexisting knowledge claims, further enriches this analysis by highlighting the heterogeneity of the independence movement, transcending a monolithic interpretation.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to offer a decolonial reading of Alavi's discernment on the independence movement of the sub-continent in general and specifically of Pakistan. This study questions traditional historiography and reveals overlooked or silenced narratives. It emphasizes the need to acknowledge the diverse motivations and practical alliances that supported the movement, providing new perspectives on the intricate dynamics of nationalism and partition.

Methodology

This study deploys textual analysis methods within Mignolo's theoretical framework of decoloniality, focusing on border thinking and pluriversality. Border thinking, as Mignolo (2011) puts forward, involves

examining those knowledge claims that are left unsaid because of hegemonic knowledge claims in the colonial matrix of power. He emphasizes that coloniality is a perpetual process that keeps working even in a post-colonial epoch. The knowledge claims dwelling on borders remained either behind the façade of colonialism or hegemonic national narratives. Therefore, this study employs decoloniality as a theoretical framework that examines various narratives by using specific tools of border thinking and pluriversality to reevaluate the independence movement of Pakistan, confronting the dominant colonial and nationalistic narratives that have historically framed this period. By bringing into the limelight the experiences of diverse Muslim social classes and their pragmatic alliances, the research intends to come forward with a more nuanced and multi-dimensional understanding of the independence movement, addressing the marginalized aspects of important historical narratives. Pluriversality, a crucial concept in Mignolo's decolonial framework, highlights the coexistence of multiple, often conflicting narratives and discourses. This study deploys pluriversality and border thinking to examine the diverse motivations and strategies utilized by various social groups within the independence movement. Instead of enforcing a singular, homogenizing narrative, the study demonstrates the diversity of interests and the practical alliances in a larger Muslim community of the then sub-continent.

Analysis

Alavi ([2002](#)) offers a rereading of some misread partition road signs and calls into question the historicity that narrates and interprets various milestones on the road to independence. From the Marxist anthropologist position, he stretches classical Marxism to encompass post-colonial conditions. He confronts a linear, official historical narrative of a few more significant incidents to show the hidden truths. He talks about the priority-based alliances among multiple social classes of the sub-continent. First, he argues that history does not reiterate, so there is no point in asking if partition could have been avoided. Therefore, he discusses contradictory perception-based interpretations of the two nations, Pakistan and India. He insists on revising a few incidents that Hindus and Muslims encountered on the road to independent states. He does not claim to present an alternative history since his point of view is not that of a historicist; nevertheless, he takes another position in the colonial matrix to dig out truths outside the parenthesis and investigate how things are viewed from that position. Alavi ([2002](#)) mentions many times a Muslim social class in the sub-continent Muslim ashraf or upper classes of Northern India that he calls the successors of the immigrants of Africa, Central Asia, and Iran. He highlights three components of Muslim Ashraf: educated professionals, less in number but a bourgeoning Anglo-vernacular salariat class, "in Gramsci's language, they were an auxiliary class, not the biggest class in number but the most articulate" (p, 4515). The second component of Muslim Ashraf was Ulama, and the third significant component was landlords. All three members had different priorities, conflicts, and associations with Hindu and English communities. Their response towards colonial formation was also varied according to their social position. A rivalry was nourished between the Muslim salariat and the Hindu salariat since the Muslim salariat, who no doubt was a bit behind in taking the English language, demanded a safeguard in the form of an equal share in jobs. With this motive, they could mobilize support from the other social classes as they also had organic links with the peasant and landlord classes. Here, the point that Alavi makes is that "religious ideology played no part in this nor did the rest of the Muslim and the non-Muslim society have any direct stake in the salariat politics" (p. 4515).

As far as the second major component of the Ashraf Ulama was concerned, they had a different conflict with the colonial formation. The replacement of Arabic, Persian, and Islamic law with the English language and system of education incited to turn them anti-colonial. They did not even share their policy towards the English language and education with the other significant components of their community, let alone the homogenous ideology. Unlike the salariat sector, they were hostile to the new education system and language that turned bigoted to the salariat or educated sector of the same community they were a part of. This component of the Muslim Ashraf was initially militant. It took an active role in the national revolt of 1857; however, after subservience, they retreated into their seminaries until The Khilafat movement and implanted a religious element in the modern politics of the Muslim community of the sub-continent. The third component of the Muslim ashraf was not directly affected by the change of education system or language as they were mostly rewarded class by the government. Nevertheless, they also join the political activity in their way under the indirect influence of the salariat class or stirred by the problems faced by

their kinsmen. Interclass rivalry is documented in the case of the hostility of Ulama against Syed Ahmad Khan, who supported Muslim education reformation. For Alavi, Syed Ahmad Khan deserved to be judged impartially since he was mostly misrepresented specifically by the Ulama because he opposed any political activity for Muslims of the sub-continent. Here, Alavi (2002) mentions Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, as many scholars consider him the pioneer of Indian nationalism. Alavi compares Bankim's views with Syed Ahmad Khan's and brings out his hostility toward the Muslims, whereas he admires English people and suggests emulating British culture and civilization to his community. Syed Ahmad Khan promoted the same thing but was reviled by his Muslim community; on the contrary, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was admired by his community for supporting Western education and culture. Alavi discusses the latter's hostility toward Muslims by examining a classical play, Anandamath, written by Bankim. When Satyananda, the hero of the play, killed all the Muslims on the battlefield and only the British were left, his master ordered him to stop killing them. When Satyananda asked his master why he should not kill the British, he said that your task was done since the Muslim power had been destroyed. Satyananda persisted that the Hindu dominion was still left to be established in the presence of the British. On this, the master of Satyananda replied:

The English will rule...physical knowledge has disappeared from our land... so we must learn it from the foreigners. The English are wise in this knowledge. And they are good teachers. Therefore, we must make the English rule...your vow is fulfilled... you have set up a British government... there are no foes now. The English are good friends as well as rulers. And no one can defeat them in battle. (Alavi, 2002, p. 4516)

Alavi (2002) establishes a few more comparisons after discussing the interclass motives of the Muslim community, the relationship between two major communities of the sub-continent, and their respective connection with the ruling society, the British. He discusses some critical incidents and early alliances in making the Congress and The Muslim League. Mohsin-ul-Malik arranged a meeting between the Muslim notables and the Viceroy on October 1, 1906, to discuss their concerns. For the Indian nationals, it was a British conspiracy to divide and rule by keeping Indian Muslims away from the nationalist movement. Maulana Muhammad Ali named this meeting a 'command performance'. On December 30, 1906, the All India Muslim League was founded. Viqar-ul-Malik of Aligarh led it. Besides the congress and the Muslim League, Alavi (2002) takes into account other class base movements in different regions of India; for instance, he mentions the Dravidian movement in South India that was linguistically based, encompassing four southern languages, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Kannada.

Initially, the agenda was to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity since Jinnah himself was one of the most motivated advocates of this unity, even after formally joining the Muslim league in October 1913. The Lucknow pact was one of the most significant examples of striving for this unity. Alavi (2002) comments that the Lucknow pact's achievement was to bridge the two major communities. "It was the Muslim league and Jinnah who had initiated that bid for unity. Jinnah was a unifier and not a separatist, as generally suggested" (p. 4519). Alavi (2002) studies the role of two significant milestones on the road to partition: The Lucknow pact and the Khilafat movement. These two landmarks also reveal the mind setup of two giant leaders, Jinnah and Gandhi. He posits that the Khilafat movement, accentuated by Gandhi joining it, "torpedoed the new political dynamic of the joint struggle of the Muslim League and the Congress against the colonial rule that was set in motion by the Lucknow Pact" (p. 4520). The Khilafat movement mobilized only one segment of a large community, and that was the Deoband school of thought. Even from the Ulama, the Barelvis school of thought did not recognize the Ottoman Sultan as the khalifa for the reason of his not being a descendant of Quraysh, let alone all Muslims of the sub-continent. Gandhi became a prominent political leader at the end of the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements. Through the Khilafat movement, however, Gandhi succeeded in intervening in the secular Indian national movement with the religious element that was followed by a period of drastic communal riots. Alavi quotes Khaliquzzman that "the time had come to reinforce the Muslim League as the Khilafat movement was on its last leg... we decided to invite Jinnah, who had attended only one meeting of the Council of the League in Calcutta in 1919 after his walkout in December 1918, to preside over the Muslim League session at Lahore in May 1924" (Alavi, 2002, p, 4520). From then on, alliances developed between the Muslim League and the feudal class as a marriage of convenience. Another powerful block of the Unionist party was by Fazl-i-Husain and Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, an intercommunal, regional, and secular party of the Punjabi landed magnets, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. They were also loyal to the colonial regime and patronized by the British

government, who did not want to extend themselves beyond Punjab. However, on their party's terms, they bridged themselves with the all-India development through this alliance with the Muslim league. Jinnah also needed this alliance since he could not claim to be a spokesman for the Muslim community without joining the Unionist Party from Punjab.

Alavi calls into question the generalizations about Pakistan's independence movement. His deep insight differentiates social drives from the ideological drives behind the whole process of partitioning the sub-continent. The religious element first appeared when the Khilafat movement was proceeded by a communal fraction of the sub-continent. It was actually after partition when Islamic ideology was nourished in Pakistan. He maintains that "the Indian Muslim movement was driven by the concrete objectives of the social groups involved, rather than by some abstract ideology" (Alavi, 2002, p. 4520). His anti-essential approach questions universal fiction propounded by hegemonic actors to represent the whole movement according to specific choices and political needs. An interior critique of Alavi unearths the communal heterogeneity and contingency that dotted the entire scenario of the independence movement instead of the homogenous masking of the events fermented by a meta-ideology. He discusses the critical events, their ambivalence, bigotries, and alliances as significant milestones during the movement, which were perennial and transferred to the next phase, i.e., after independence. On that score, Alavi confronts another universal fiction of nationalism and nationhood in a post-colony.

To sum up, re-reading the independence movement of the Indian subcontinent, Alavi (2002) presents a detailed perspective that transcends the traditional dichotomy of anti-colonial struggle and religious ideology. While acknowledging the importance of these factors, he argues that they were not the sole drivers of the movement. His analysis reveals a more complex network of influences, emphasizing the critical role of the Muslim salariat—a secular class with vested interests—and the strategic alliances formed among different factions within the Muslim community. This multifaceted approach uncovers the practical motivations and socio-political dynamics that were involved in the establishment of Pakistan, challenging the singular narrative that has long dominated historical discourse. Mignolo's ideas of border thinking and pluriversality offer a crucial perspective to analyze how knowledge and power structures enforced by colonial and post-colonial elites have influenced dominant historiographies. By emphasizing the diverse motives and alliances that played a role in Pakistan's establishment, this research not only challenges intellectual dominance but also advocates for a more inclusive and fair understanding of history. A decolonial reading of Alavi's discernment on the partition of the subcontinent endorses pluriversality, brings into limelight his border thinking, sets the stage for a decolonial epistemology that respects diverse viewpoints and encourages a more profound dialogue, ultimately supporting the continuous effort to decolonize both territories and mentalities.

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