

Excavating the Deep History of Pakistan: Fixing the Unbearable Lightness of Pakistan's History in the College Classroom

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Having taught, for the last three decades, what I am told is the only Pakistani *history* course in the US, I propose in this paper to trace its development, address its pedagogical methods, depict its purpose and basic message to US undergraduates, confess my own theoretical approach to the various problems in its historiography, report student responses to all of the above, and ask your audience for suggestions to improve it.

The main idea is to unpack and discount the overwhelming and chronic media emphasis on the so-called Global War on Terror, while at the same time explaining Pakistan's uniqueness in the trajectory of the medieval background of conversion in South Asia; the structural effects of being the last part of South Asia conquered by European imperialism; the serial redefinitions of Islamic belief, practice, and political application before and during the British Raj; the cataclysm of Partition; its role as whipping boy in the Cold War; and its current precarious ambiguity in the face of the various stripes of insurgency and ethnic conflict during the present day. I have lived for periods of time in Lahore, travelled all over the country, and revisited it to deliver lectures and see friends. I have published a fair amount on the early modern history of the Indus Valley, mainly Cholistan/Bahawalpur, and have given many talks on the dilemmas facing Pakistan and the partial success it has had confronting them.

A very tentative, and alas editorially compromised, version of this effort appeared as "Re-writing the History of Pakistan," in News on Sunday (Islamabad: Jang News) on 23 November 2008. There was zero response from the readership of this major English weekly. For the Madison conference I would expand and explicate in much greater detail the account of this challenging and frustrating class, which has over time hosted 500 or so lower-division undergraduates at UVa. Because it has been so topical, I can give my students more work than they can expect from similar seminars in my department and elsewhere, and no one has ever dozed off or gotten mired in digital diversions.

I would aim for a 25- to 30-minute presentation.