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Venkat Dhulipala. *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam, and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial North India*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 554 pp. \$120.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-05212-3.

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Minault reviews Dhulipala

This is an important book. The idea that every generation rewrites history is certainly true in the case of the 1947 Partition of British India into India and Pakistan. Indeed, one might say that the Partition has been rewritten every decade or so. From the early depiction of negotiations around Mountbatten's table, where Muhammad Ali Jinnah was "Mr. No," obstructing all attempts at an amicable settlement, to the reinterpretation of Jinnah as an astute negotiator who used Pakistan as a bargaining chip, but had to accept it in a "moth-eaten" form that he had not imagined—these successive interpretations of high politics were then challenged by a newer history that brought in the people of the street.[1] Oral history, feminist history, creative literature, and film all tapped into the experience of Partition violence, mass migrations, and chronic deracination that some had anticipated but most found unimaginable. Bringing in history from below reinforced the thought that the Partition had been a terrible mistake, rushed into without adequate thought or understanding of what it would mean, especially for those Muslims living in provinces where they were in a minority, and who would not be part of the new Muslim homeland. Pakistan, then, was a community "insufficiently imagined," a nation in disarray from the outset.[2]

Venkat Dhulipala begs to differ, and presents an interpretation of the prehistory of Pakistan centered on the United Provinces (UP), one of those "Muslim minority" provinces. UP Muslims offered enthusiastic support to the idea of Pakistan, in embryonic form in the late 1930s but increasingly articulate following the Lahore Resolution (aka the Pakistan Resolution), passed by the All-India Muslim League in March 1940. According to Dhulipala, Pakistan was to be a new Medina, patterned on the city in Arabia that became the seat of the Prophet Muhammad's new faith in the seventh century and the nucleus of his spreading community of believ-

ers. Medina was also portrayed as a sheltering environment where numerous religious communities interacted peaceably. The Lahore Resolution called for a Muslim state or states in the northwest and east of India, and referred to possible territorial adjustments, but the wording was sufficiently ambiguous to leave room for speculation about the meaning and shape of the Muslim homeland(s). Though Jinnah and his opinions appear throughout this hefty volume, he is often drowned out by others' thoughts and words. This is not, therefore, history from above; nor is it history from below. Rather, this is history from the middle, the views—spoken and published—of the men who were active in politics, the press, the schools, and the mosques and madrasas of northern India in the decade preceding Indian independence. Dhulipala's thesis is that, far from being insufficiently imagined, Pakistan was an idea abundantly articulated that became increasingly coherent, and even undeniable.

There is plenty of room for disagreement with this thesis, but Dhulipala's massive work of research is nevertheless impressive. He has assembled views for and against Pakistan, from among Muslims Western-educated and 'ulama, lawyers, journalists, political office holders, civil servants, and the landed (great and small), some well-known, others less so. This is a collection representative of the middle class, the literate few, but also those who through their speeches and publications were in a position to influence public opinion. This is thus a cross-section of the public sphere, and although Dhulipala's selection of sources is broad, there are lacunae. The 'ulama are well represented, but there is little mention of Sufi *pirs*, only a few Shi'as, and almost no women. Urdu sources are richly diverse and although the Progressives, Urdu writers on the left, appear in connection with the Muslim Mass Contact Movement initiated by the Indian National Congress in the late 1930s, they then drop from view. Some of the writings quoted are from periodicals

with wide circulation or are speeches from political campaigns with mass audiences. Other writings quoted are by genuinely obscure figures, about whom Dhulipala can only speculate, which makes it hard to gauge their significance.

One very well-known author examined by Dhulipala is Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the Dalit political leader whose sharp legal mind later gave shape to the Indian Constitution. In 1940, in response to the Lahore Resolution, he published his *Thoughts on Pakistan* (reprinted in 1945 as *Pakistan or the Partition of India*). Neither a Muslim nor from UP, Ambedkar wrote supporting the idea of Pakistan, and Jinnah—another sharp Bombay lawyer—recommended the book to those who wished to comprehend the two-nation theory. Ambedkar's intended audience was presumably Hindus, whom he advised to give up their romantic devotion to an undivided India and recognize the Muslims' right to self-determination. This, he felt, would be a political solution to the communal problem. Regarding the separate Muslim states in the northwest and the east of India mentioned in the Lahore Resolution, and the possible territorial adjustments envisaged, Ambedkar appended maps of the Punjab and Bengal-Assam showing how those provinces could be divided between Muslim- and Hindu-majority areas. These maps are reproduced among the illustrations in Dhulipala's book in grey and white, which is not as clear as the green and saffron coloration in Ambedkar's original. One wonders if Jinnah actually read Ambedkar carefully, for here is a scheme of dividing Punjab and Bengal provinces that Jinnah later vehemently opposed. In other respects also, *Thoughts on Pakistan* is hardly flattering to Muslims. Regarding the communal minorities that would remain in India and Pakistan, Ambedkar commented on the theory that the Hindus and Sikhs in what became Pakistan would serve as a guarantee that the Muslims who remained in India would be treated fairly, and vice versa. He called this a dreadful idea, in effect, "a scheme of communal peace through a system of communal hostages" (p. 140). This, however, was a theory articulated by several Muslim leaders, including Fazlul Haq, the premier of Bengal at the time. Ambedkar also examined the Indian army, noting that Punjabi Muslims made up a sizable proportion of its ranks and speculated on what would happen if India were invaded by Muslim states from the northwest (p. 135). Could the Muslim soldiers be counted on to remain loyal? The way to avoid a Muslim-dominated army, which might be a security risk, would be to accept partition. Dhulipala's lengthy exegesis of Ambedkar's work is fascinating for what it reveals of the kinds of speculation concerning partition that were

in circulation at the time. Its inclusion in this book is puzzling, however, in that it has little to do with UP Muslims, except as objects of the hostage theory.

Another controversy in the literature about Pakistan at that time was whether the Muslim homeland would be "Islamic" in nature, and what exactly that meant. In this connection, Jinnah's speech to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947, is frequently cited as proof that he did not envisage Pakistan as "Islamic." All citizens of Pakistan would be free to worship as they wished, Jinnah said, and that had nothing to do with the state. There were others, many of them 'ulama, who envisaged an Islamic state for Pakistan and made efforts to articulate what that would entail. An interesting, if also puzzling, inclusion in Dhulipala's book is a document that emerged from a committee of 'ulama convened by the UP Muslim League in the early 1940s, chaired by Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadwi, the leader of Lucknow's Nadwat ul-'Ulama. The committee was charged with drafting a blueprint for an Islamic constitution for the future state of Pakistan (and thus Dhulipala concludes that the Islamic nature of Pakistan—if not its specifics—was already set). Sulaiman Nadwi delegated the job of drafting the document to another Nadwi 'alim, M. Ishaq Sandelvi, "an elusive figure about whom not much is known" (p. 233). Rather than a constitutional outline or framework, Sandelvi produced a 300-page work: *Islam ka Siyasi Nizam* (The Political System of Islam). This was more than the committee had bargained for. The committee had agreed that each member would prepare comments on Sandelvi's "outline," and the members would then reconvene to produce a final plan. Only one member wrote comments, however, and the committee never met again. Little wonder. Sandelvi's study looked back to an absolutist caliph, with only an appointed council as a dubious curb to his power, no provision for popular elections, and a state where slavery and summary executions were allowed. Most copies of this document were lost; Sulaiman Nadwi's own copy resurfaced in the 1950s and was published in India. Dhulipala summarizes the text at some length and—because Sulaiman Nadwi eventually served in an advisory capacity to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in drafting the 1957 Constitution—asserts the importance of Sandelvi's text as "the primary source" of Nadwi's recommendations. This is highly dubious. There may be a reason that, as Dhulipala notes, "Political and constitutional histories of Pakistan have thus far not taken into account this important document" (p. 234). I found its inclusion here discordant, because it was clearly not part of public discussion in the years prior to the Partition, nor does it support Dhulipala's "New

Medina” thesis.

Dhulipala goes on to analyze the contributions of the ‘ulama to the ideas shaping Pakistan and to the campaign for a separate Muslim or Islamic state. Two chapters make clear the variety of arguments issuing from the religious ranks for and against Pakistan. Notable among the divines critical of Pakistan was Maulana Syed M. Sajjad, head of the Anjuman-i-Ulama-i-Bihar and founder of the Muslim Independent Party that was allied with the Muslim League in the late 1930s. After the Lahore Resolution in 1940, Sajjad split from the Muslim League and Jinnah. He was skeptical of the Muslim League’s capacity to establish an Islamic state, and he also attacked the hostage theory as a potential guarantor of Muslim-minority rights in India. The idea was opposed to common sense: “No Muslim government ... could commit atrocities on its own peace-loving citizens, simply because Muslims were being persecuted elsewhere.” And it was also contrary to the shari’ah, “which expressly enjoined Muslim rulers to treat non-Muslims with fairness and compassion” (p. 285). Maulana Sajjad’s position was an outspoken expression of the reasons that Muslims in the minority provinces should be wary of calls to sacrifice for the sake of a Pakistan to be established in the majority provinces. These criticisms were echoed by others cited by Dhulipala. An additional argument against the idea of partition had to do with the religious injunction to preach the faith (*tabligh*). ‘Ulama voiced concern that with the delineation of separate Muslim-majority states, proselytization of Islam in India would be severely curtailed, if not forbidden altogether.

On the other hand, there were ‘ulama staunchly in favor of Pakistan, chief of whom was Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani of Deoband, India’s leading madrasa. Maulana Usmani was a disciple of another leading Deobandi ‘alim and Sufi: Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi, who was among the first of the ‘ulama to support the Muslim League in the late 1930s. Usmani founded the Jamiatul ‘Ulama-i-Islam (JUI) in 1945, a political party of ‘ulama who supported the Pakistan idea, but maintained their independence of the League in order to stress religious guidance. The JUI was a direct challenge to the Jamiatul ‘Ulama-i-Hind (JUH), the senior party of Indian ‘ulama, founded in the 1920s, also by Deobandis. The leader of the JUH was Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, eloquent exponent of the idea of *muttahida qaumiyat* (united nationalism) and a supporter of the Congress in its opposition to partition. Maulana Usmani took on Maulana Madani in a debate that is analyzed in detail by Dhulipala. A report from the Usmani camp claims that he carried the day. Nevertheless, Dhulipala is correct to under-

line that the Indian ‘ulama did not speak with one voice. The historiography on Deoband emphasizes its nationalist credentials, but Usmani and the JUI belie that generalization. Usmani was also the advocate of Pakistan as “the first Islamic state in history that would attempt to reconstruct the Islamic utopia created by the Prophet in Medina” (p. 360). Thus he seems to be the source of the image contained in the title, and the thesis, of Dhulipala’s book.

There is much more in this book than the texts singled out here. A chapter on the Urdu press and public opinion is devoted to the newspaper *Medina* of Bijnor, a UP Urdu periodical that enjoyed wide circulation throughout India. Dhulipala summarizes of a critique of Pakistan by Maulana Syed Abu Syed Bazmi and a defense of Pakistan by Maulana Abul Nazar Rizvi Amrohavi, together with letters from readers responding both for and against, and some expressing bewilderment. The chapters of textual analysis are bookended by an initial consideration of the elections of 1937 and the Muslim League’s subsequent revival that culminated in the Lahore Resolution of 1940. The last chapter then reports on the elections of 1945, the “referendum on Pakistan,” with a description of the mobilization of the students of Aligarh Muslim University who canvassed enthusiastically and successfully in support of the Muslim League. Dhulipala includes a section on the Urdu political poetry of that campaign, gleaned from a pamphlet published in Bombay. One could quibble about whether those verses were ever heard in UP, but surely political doggerel was a part of student and Muslim League processions, as it has been in all South Asian elections.

I stated above that this is an important book. Although I focused on some texts that I felt were puzzling or misfits, not supportive of the author’s thesis (perhaps as a plea for a shorter book), much of this work is both fascinating and enlightening. It is also eloquent testimony to the capacity of South Asian Muslims to disagree among themselves. Venkat Dhulipala has provided much food for thought and unearthed a host of sources that demonstrate, without doubt, that Pakistan was not “insufficiently imagined.” On the contrary, it was abundantly imagined, both vehemently opposed and extravagantly supported, with many shades of opinion in between. Whether this means, as Dhulipala claims in his introduction, that Pakistan was not vague, but rather “an idea that progressively assumed clarity, substance, and popularity” (p. 18), remains an open question.

Notes

- [1]. Jinnah had earlier labeled a Pakistan with those

territorial boundaries “maimed, mutilated and moth-eaten.” Quoted in Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), 121.

[2]. The phrase is from Philip Oldenburg “‘A Place Insufficiently Imagined’: Language, Belief, and the Pakistan Crisis of 1971,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 44, no. 4 (1985): 711-733.

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