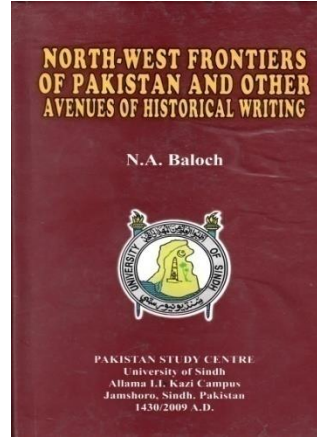


**DR.N.A.BALOCH'S "NORTH-WEST  
FRONTIERS OF PAKISTAN AND OTHER  
AVENUES OF HISTORICAL WRITINGS:  
An Analytical Overview**

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Dr. N. A. Baloch is indubitably an outstanding polymath and multi-dimensional scholar of international standing and repute and to venture analysis and review of his works is indeed a herculean task, at least for this scribe. Pakistan Study Centre has performed a commendable feat by publishing with rare academic dedication and persistent devotion most of Dr.Baloch's invaluable researched works under their publication scheme. The Centre commenced publication of Dr.Baloch work's with "History of Sindhi Language and Literature" (in Sindhi) in 1990 followed by his three well known works in English. These are: "Education based on Islamic Values-Imperatives and Implications" (2000), "Sindh Studies-Historical" (2003) and "Sindh Studies-Cultural" (2004). The present volume under review was edited by Dr.Baloch himself in 2009 at the request of Pakistan Study Centre and comprises his now memorable historical essays and articles which were hitherto scattered in various research journals in Pakistan and overseas.

This reviewer has endeavored to undertake an analytical overview of all the articles in the book mentioned above. There are eighteen articles on varied historical topics ranging from the study of evolution of historical writings to an invigorative comparative discourse on Maulana Rumi to Shah Abdul Latif from a fresh perspective. These topics are indeed cerebrally challenging to the readers and are culturally insightful, intensively stimulating and thought provoking. Serious students of history and full time researchers will genuinely relish and imbibe the labour of love, distilled in these articles written by our eminent scholar and historian.



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Dr. Baloch himself acknowledges that the topics listed in this book were explored on different occasions for self study and each one was concluded after achieving a general understanding of the issues involved. He confesses that no in-depth study was initially intended and the objective was to seek and solve the problems and effort was made to learn than to teach. No doubt it is a characteristic humility of a profound researcher who is not vainly flaunting his egoistic erudition before the ordinary mortals like the present reviewer, who had had the rare privilege of working under him as a student of ethnology and historiography. Dr.N. A. Baloch has been very economical in this book with hyperbolic platitudes and academic formalities commonly encountered in our contemporary academia with its so-called historical researches based on personal grudges and biases.

The first article “Development of Historical Writings” deals with historiography since and before the establishment of Pakistan (1947). There has been little or almost no endeavour worth mentioning on such an important subject matter before Dr. Baloch’s exploratory deliberation contained in this article. The article presents perspicuously the development of Indo-Muslim historiography in a correct and proper perspective and dispassionately evaluates its evolutionary process in the post-independence period. The writer meticulously classifies and divides the research topic into two disparate segments. According to him it presents the development of the early Muslim and the Indo-Muslim historiography followed by the colonial interlude up to the attainment of independence. This represents the ‘tradition’, and the development since 1947 denotes the ‘progress’. The learned historian has presented a general panoramic landscape of the main trends in historiography during both the periods and underscores pertinent concerns and issues involved in the course of future trajectory.

The second topic “The North-West Frontier Regions” introduces a geo-political narrative pertaining to our great Indus valley heritage and the Sindhian saga. We are told that the North-West Frontiers of the present day Pakistan, formerly Al-Hind were referred to as ‘Indian Front’ in the early pristine historical records. The article assumes significant relevance for a serious student in the context of comprehending current international conflict in Afghanistan, the imperialistic designs of the Unipolar Super Power

and its egregious consequences on the sub-continental relations. Thus the imperatives of Indus/Sindhian primacy in its geo-political backdrop since times immemorial can be read into this article through teleological visualization by the visionary scholar.

The third article “The Turkish States and Principalities During the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Centuries A.D.” delineates the impact of Turkish/Turani dominance in the medieval ages in Indian sub-continent. We know after reading this enlightening piece of historical prose that in the ancient past, the regions extending to the East/South East of Iran through the modern Pakistan and Afghanistan towards the Oxus (Darya Amu) were inhabited by the ethnic stocks related or otherwise, belonged mainly to the Turkish race, and left its indelible imprint or their ethnic signature tune ‘Tur’ on the vast swathes which later came to be called Turan.

Dr. Baloch refers to a vast array of research on the early Turkish states, Kabul or Kabulistan, Bamiyan (remember the mammoth statue of Buddha destroyed by Taliban), Zabul or Zabulistan, Khurasan, Koh Payab, Turan, Kaikanan, Bukan, the traditions recorded by Al-Beruni and concludes this insightful narrative based on his empirical analysis. The findings are indeed impressively comprehensive rather awe-inspiring as these are presented in a single brief self contained article. The references cited in the second article are also unquestionably exhaustive ranging from such authorities like Cunningham to Bennet’s ‘Antiquities of India’ interspersed with a plethora of medieval Arabic and Persian standard historical manuscripts and published works. Likewise in the third article, the research notes and citations are wide-ranging premised on the classic sources like al-Baladhuri’s *Futuh al-Baldan*, *Tarikh-e-Seistan*, Ibn Khuldun and *Tarikh Khalifa bin Khayyat*, and last but not the least the ubiquitous Al-Beruni (*Kitab al-Hind*).

The fourth article is very engaging as deals with age-old rivalry verging on antagonistic confrontation between the Arabs and the Ajmis (Persians/Iranians). The learned scholar has discussed threadbare the Persian/Arab rivalry on sea with his lively description of the last battles on the Sindhian/Indian coast line. The reference to *Fatah-i-Nama Sindh*, an earlier Arabic work which was translated in the Persian in the year 613 A.H/1216 A.D. is especially relevant for the students of Pakistan Studies. Dr. Baloch quoting from *Fatah-i-Nama Sindh* alias *Chachnama* states: “Those well versed in these

chronicles have reported that the first attack of the army of Islam against Sindh and Hind was mounted during the caliphate of Umar in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the Hijra. The Caliph first sent Uthman bin Abi al-As al-Thaqafi to Bahrain, and he set out with his forces to Oman and assembled boats with soldiers and held them in readiness by the sea route. He then assigned the command of that fleet to Mughira bin Abi al-As and dispatched him to Bahrain to proceed from there to Daibul”. Before, I move ahead with analysis, let me reiterate here that Dr. N. A. Baloch was pleasantly overwhelmed in this book by the themes, leitmotifs and purport of the various subjects reflected in the eighteen topics and is illustratively eloquent even before the reader starts his/her journey into the domain of medieval historic lore. Reverting back to the first topic of this book, Dr. Baloch passionately shares that originally it was entitled “Historical Writings on Pakistan, Tradition and Progress” and for the present book he has changed its title “Development of Historical Writings”. I have already discussed this article in the beginning by evaluating this essay in some detail.

Dr. Baloch was rightly proud of his article number two, which has also been deliberated at the outset. He fervently elucidates the topic with his scholastic attitude and perspicuity leading to insightful comprehension of the subject by the lay readers and professional readers alike. The writer informs that it pertains to the geo-political habitat commonly known as the North-West Frontier Region (of Pakistan, the sub-continent in the past) which have been the cradle of migration from Central Asia and from Khurasan and Iran, beginning with their initial settlements and later entry into the sub-continent. Nonetheless, Dr. Baloch maintains that despite this phenomenon, historical geography of regions is not properly defined to assess the changing power-structures and the onward thrust and conquests. The writer substantiates his cogent arguments and historical discourse with copious references from early Islamic sources. According to Dr. Baloch his third topic, deliberated above, explores the distribution of Turkish tribes and their power structure in North-West Frontier Regions during the 7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The fourth and fifth topics (from Sassanian/Arab conflict to Sindhian/Indian Fronts) succinctly encapsulate in chronological sequence the fateful and ominously crucial impact, nay disastrous denouement of the ethnic Iranian Sassanian/Arab confrontation on sea and land engulfing consequentially the Sindhian/Indian fronts. In the words of learned

writer: “this road map of medieval history has not been hitherto surveyed.” Indeed this goes without saying that such an ambitious timeline of medieval Indian history had not been attempted before in this part of the sub-continent since the times of Prof. Jadu Nath Sircar, Dr. Ishwari Parshad or Dr Tara Chand, let alone our Pakistani historians like Dr. I. H. Qureshi, Dr. Riazul Islam, Dr. Ahmad Hasan Dani or Dr. Muhmud Hussain. I am convinced that all the aforementioned scholars/historians would have abundantly commended the endeavors of Dr. Baloch, had they been alive today.

Speaking about his sixth topic Dr. Baloch dilates that as the title indicates “The Ancient Dynasties of Sindh”, the rule of the Scythians/Sakas has been focused for the first time. This again is a hitherto unexplored field in Sindhi historiography as our contemporary historians concentrate mostly on the Mughul, Arghun and Turkhan periods as probably the source material is easily available on these topics in the public and private libraries of Pakistan and a substantial number of Persian knowing scholars work in our academia. The Arab heritage of the sub-continent is now confined to our religious seminaries who are currently engaged in sectarian polemics. Dr. Baloch had a unique advantage of being at home in both Arabic and Persian languages and therefore he devoted most of his research to medieval Arab/Persian sources. One tends to concur with Dr. Baloch when he enunciates that the Scythians were replaced by the Buddhist Rai Dynasty followed by the Brahman Chach Dynasty. He takes care to mention the chronological sequential narration along with the reigning period of the sovereigns of the two Dynasties. He also underlines the fact that credit indeed goes to early Muslim historians who probed into the opaque historical records of the pre-Islamic era. Apropos of the remainder part of the book comprising particularly the next eight chapters/topics, Dr. Baloch in his ‘Preface’ concisely remarks that “these have been investigated in the light of more reliable data. It may be worthwhile to discuss these topics briefly”. The eight topics are: “The Takka Country”, “The advent and Impact of Islam in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century AD”, “Failure of Fatimid/Druzi Da’wa in Sindh as reflected in the contemporary documents Risalat-i-Hind”, “Islam in Kashmir during the first Hijra century”, “Political stature of Lahore during the Ghaznavid period”, “Iranian, Turkish and Pakistani peoples” and the last one is entitled: “Islamic Civilization in Central Asia”. It will not be an euphoric exaggeration to surmise that

all these articles bear an unmistakable imprint of dedicated research and scholarship redolent of Dr. Baloch.

The seventh chapter/topic “The Takka country is an enlightening episodic narration pertaining to Taxila and its people. It illustrates that name Taxila is but a reminiscent of the ascendancy of the Tak people in the northern most region of the Punjab. The writer is of the opinion that it must have been founded by a chief or a king of the Taks, since prefix Tak refers to the Tak people who founded it and lavishly cites references to the cognate formation of the nomenclature Taxila such as Takshasila (classical), Takkasila (Pali), Takshacila (Indo-Bactrian coins), Takun/Tukan (Vasudwa’s coins) Tseh-kia (Hsuan Tsang), Taqin/Taqan (early Muslim scholar/geographers), Takkiyyah/ Takesar (Fathnama), Takarshala (Beruni), Takeshar (Beruni and Gardezi). He also explicates that the lower Indus valley of Sindh and the southern Punjab were possibly the first home and habitat of the Tak people. According to ‘Beglarnama’, the ‘Pania’, the ‘Tak’ and the ‘Mumed’ were the most ancient rulers of Sindh. The next topic was contributed by the author on the occasion of ‘World of Islam Festival in 1976 at the International Congress London and is extensively readable and informative. It is entitled “The Advent and Impact of Islam in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century AD”. The learned writer traces the events leading to the advent of Islam in the lands comprising present day Pakistan. He postulates: “There were three distinct episodes / periods—from 23 AH/644 AD to 61 AH/680 AD, when Makran and western regions of Balochistan were conquered. Again from 92 AH/711 AD to 95 AH/715 AD when eastern Balochistan, Multan and Western Punjab were conquered; and the later eras were of the Umayyad and the Abbasid Caliphates when for an interval, Islamic flag was hoisted over the northern valleys of the Indus and the north western Gandhara country”.

In a next topic “Failure of Fatimid/Druez Da’wa in Sindh as reflected in the contemporary document Risalat al-Hind, the writer authoritatively expresses that the document Risalat al-Hind or ‘Letter of India’ is not a new discovery, it has been in the knowledge of scholars since the early periods of Indo-Muslim history. The French orientalist, Silvertre de Sacy used it in his study of the Druez religion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Dr. Baloch in his own words, noticed a brief reference to it in the writings of to eminent British imperialist scholars Elliot and Dowson’s especially in their landmark work

'History of India'. The appendix carries a facsimile of the 'Risalat al-Hind' which adds to the inherent value of the article. He also acknowledges all the assistance he received in 1966 from the eminent historian and Islamist par excellence Dr. Hamidullah in finding his way to the manuscript record of Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

The last four articles reflect author's personal predilection for his most favorite field i.e. cultural history of Indus Valley. Dr. Baloch has included in these articles areas of language, culture and science and deems them as positive fruits of historical development and for him there is a special interest in a linkage between Maulana Rumi and Shah Latif. The last article in this compendium is on "Specific Gravity of Metals and Minerals" as defined by Beruni. The writer claims that it pertains to the discipline and domain of history of science and illustrates the contribution of Beruni (d.4443 AH/1051 AD) who had extensively traveled and researched in the present areas of Pakistan. While in Ghazni (Ghazana), he calculated the relative weights of metals and minerals and illuminated the concept of specific gravity. The cultural literary topics near to the heart of Dr. Baloch may be viewed in the context of Dr. Baloch's unique background in the fields of philology, linguistics, semantics and comparative grammar which he had inherited from his longstanding studies in these areas in the tradition of Professor Max Muller of Oxford University and his youthful inspiration to Mirza Kalich Baig and Behrimal Mahrchand Advani. In his article on philology and comparative linguistics "Some less known dialects of Kohistan", he explains that this Kohistan refers to the mountainous region covering western part of the Hazara district, extending northward along the Indus as well as west-wards across Swat towards Dir and Chitral. This entire region is known as Kohistan, he contrasts it with our Sindhi Kohistan, the hilly tract extending from Karachi northward up to Sehwan. This article is substantially useful for the scholars and lay students of socio-linguistic as it dwells on classic work of Grierson i.e. 'Linguistic Survey of India'. He refers to Grierson and states that this eminent British scholar supported his views regarding an early philological link between Sindhi and Lahnda on the one hand and the Dardic languages on the other.

The next two important articles are of extensive cultural relevance for the foreign scholars and the native seekers of wisdom. These are "Historical Development of Sindhi Language" and

have all come through these Arab researchers. Amongst them, Jahiz (d.912), Ibn Khurdabdhbeh (868/69), Madaini (d.225 AH/480 AD), Mas'udi (946) Istakheri (d. circa 955) al-Nadim (d.995), Beruni (d. 1051) and Yaqut (d.1229) may be included. They had definitely contributed to our knowledge of history, language and general cultural ethos of Sindh up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD.

The best of all articles from the point of view of modern ethnological studies and literary heritage is of course in my opinion is "Maulana Rumi to Shah Abdul Latif". The research here is simply ground-breaking and innovatively far reaching. It delineates how Rumi's teachings through Masnavi influenced Sindhi poet laureate Shah Abdul Latif. The author highlights through his thesis an objective study of Masnavi and Risalo (poetic compendium of Latif) and subtly draws parallelism between the two literary masters of the oriental literature. In particular context the higher concepts and meanings are the common denominator between the two. Masnavi is regarded by the sufi scholar as "Hast Quran Der Ziban-e-Pahlvi" Quran in Persian while Shah Latif had himself proclaimed:

These which you consider as mere bayts (verses),

Ar ayats of the Quran to lead the mind to the Beloved

He predicates his arguments on this cogent paradigm as in Masnavi. He asserts:

"The meaning and implications of Wahadat al-Wajud are often reflected in the verses of Risalo though Ibn al-Arabi is not named by him (Shah)".

These reflections carry shades of meaning which are yet to be analyzed to grasp the essence of Shah Latif's perception. There are at least two subjects which are illuminated both in Masnavi and Risalo, viz. Nay (reed flute) and the Elephant which was described differently by those who touched it, says Dr. Baloch. He however cautions the readers in his concluding remarks that a comparative study of Masnavi and of Risalo reveals some parallelism though a few, not many depending upon sensibilities of the reader. He again warns that there may occur an awareness of similar ideas, sameness of imagination and semblance of some perceptions, yet there is no borrowing of words and phrases, of contexts and conclusions.

To sum up the book is a veritable treasure-trove of historical and cultural insights and is a profound research document reflecting the glorious past of the Indus Valley Civilization.