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THE COMPOSITE SOUL: CULTURAL SYNCRETISM AS SINDH'S TOOL OF RESISTANCE IN SIRAJ'S HISTORICAL TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the role of cultural syncretism as Sindh's main weapon of anti-colonial resistance in Sirajul Haq Memon's (Siraj's) historical trilogy Echo Is the Call (translated by Dr. Amjad Siraj Memon, 2015), Rendezvous with Death (translated by Dr. Amjad Siraj Memon, 2017), and Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (translated by Dr. Amjad Siraj Memon, 2018). Using Catherine Belsey's (2013) qualitative textual analysis and Tony Bennett and John Frow's (2008) cultural analysis which understands culture as a set of practices that constitute social life and identity - within the wider purview of postcolonial theory, especially Homi Bhabha's (1994) idea of cultural hybridity and the Third Space, Aijaz Ahmed's (1992) critique of nationalist essentialism, and Arjun Appadurai's (1990) theory of cultural flows, the paper demonstrates that across the three centuries of colonial encounters, Arghun-Tarkhan in the sixteenth century, Mughal in the 17th century and British in the 19th and 20th centuries. Sindhi people in Siraj's fiction use their composite cultural identity as the most resilient and potent tool of anti-colonial resistance. The paper discerns four interrelated aspects of syncretic resistance in the trilogy: multi-religious solidarity in the shrine-based Sufi tradition; the material culture of language, textiles, and folk art as markers of inevitable Sindhi identity; the collective practices of music, poetry, and festival as assertions of cultural identity; and the political philosophy of land-belonging that grounds Sindhi solidarity across tribal, caste, and religious divisions. The paper shows that Siraj's portrayal of syncretism is not just descriptive - not just a realistic depiction of Sindhi life - but normative and political: the composite soul of Sindh is what colonial violence most fears and most aggressively attempts to eradicate, and what remains.

KEYWORDS: Siraj, syncretism, Sindhi literature, postcolonial resistance, cultural hybridity, Belsey, Bennett and Frow, Echo Is the Call, Rendezvous with Death, Parched Land Wandering Clouds

INTRODUCTION

In a scene in Sirajul Haq Memon's Echo Is the Call (2015), the blacksmith-warrior Sodhal, galloping through the occupied streets of Thatta in the night, shuts his eyes and tells himself about Sindh: 'my lovely and sweet Sindhi language; these mosques and mandirs, its folk art and music, its shrines, its Sufis and saints, its healers and farmers, its labourers and blacksmiths, its cobblers and masons, my sweet motherland Sindh' (Siraj, 2015, p. 32). The list is notable for its inclusivity: not one religion but two - mosques and mandirs; not one class but many - Sufis and cobblers, saints and farmers; not one artistic tradition but the composite culture of folk - music, art, language. In one sentence, Sodhal defines Sindh not as an ethnic province or a religious sect but as a composite civilization - plural, inclusive, and rooted in the lived experience of a certain land and its water sources.

This composite view of the Sindhi people - what I call cultural syncretism - is central to Siraj's literary project. Throughout his historical trilogy, Siraj depicts Sindhi syncretism not simply as a cultural fact about how Sindhi society is typically constituted but as the chief political resource that Sindhi people use to resist colonialism. The Arghun and Tarkhan colonizers of Echo Is the Call seek to eradicate this composite identity by imposing Persian language and Kandhari orthodoxy; the Mughal colonizers of Rendezvous with Death (2017) try to divide and rule by exploiting tribal, religious and caste differences; the British colonial state of Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (2018) allies with the feudal class to undermine the solidarity of the peasant class, which the Sufi syncretic tradition promotes. In each instance, the colonial project is to destroy the composite soul of Sindh by dividing it into its parts. And in each case,

Siraj's fictional freedom fighters respond by reaffirming and strengthening the syncretic solidarity of Sindhi civilization.

This paper uses the term "cultural syncretism" to refer to the particular Sindhi cultural formation that Siraj represents: a historical composite of Islamic Sufi piety, pre-Islamic Indus Valley culture, Hindu folk culture, and the everyday practices of a multi-community agrarian civilization. This formation is not the same as Bhabha's (1994) theoretical concept of hybridity - which refers to the ambivalent cultural zone of colonial encounter - because Sindhi syncretism precedes the colonial encounter, and offers the cultural means for resisting it. It is not the hybrid result of colonial mixing but an indigenous composite tradition that colonialism seeks to eradicate. Ahmad (1992) would stress this point: the cultural analysis must be grounded in the material and political circumstances of the colonised, not abstract theories of cultural hybridity. For Siraj, syncretism is a historical fact about Sindhi culture and a political claim: the composite nature of Sindhi culture is its greatest accomplishment and most potent weapon against colonialism.

This interpretation has important theoretical implications. Postcolonial theory, from Frantz Fanon's (1961) description of the nationalist psyche to Homi Bhabha's (1994) theory of cultural hybridity, has always been interested in the relationship between culture and politics in the colonial and postcolonial experience. What Siraj brings to this debate and what this paper argues is his most original contribution to postcolonial literary studies, is a detailed, historical and textually informed account of the syncretic character of a particular cultural tradition as the basis for its political survival. The composite soul of Sindh is not the hybrid offspring of colonialism but a pre-colonial formation of great antiquity grounded in the civilizational history of the Indus Valley, the devotional cultures of Sufi Islam, the folk cultures of the Sindhi spoken tradition, and the pluralistic social practices of the pre-colonial agrarian community that colonial violence seeks to eradicate precisely because it knows that in the composite soul of Sindh lies the source of the Sindhi people's remarkable cultural and political resilience.

Research Question

This paper addresses the following research question:

How does Sirajul Haq Memon's historical trilogy Echo Is the Call, Rendezvous with Death, and Parched Land, Wandering Clouds represent cultural syncretism as Sindh's primary tool of resistance against successive colonial regimes, and what specific dimensions of syncretic cultural practice does Siraj identify as the most durable and effective forms of anti-colonial self-assertion?

Statement of the Problem

Sindhi cultural syncretism has been chronicled by historians and anthropologists (Ramey, 2008; Sorley, 1940; Boivin, 2008) and extolled in the classical poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689-1752), whose Shah Jo Risalo is the philosophical manifesto of Sindhi composite cultural identity. Yet, the literary-critical analysis of the role of syncretism as a political tool of anti-colonial resistance in Sindhi fiction has not been systematically undertaken in English language scholarship. This is significant because Siraj's historical trilogy offers the most philosophically and historically developed literary representation of Sindhi syncretic culture in modern Sindhi literature - and because its analysis through the twin lenses of Belsey's (2013) textual analysis and Bennett and Frow's (2008) cultural analysis offers a more complex understanding of the political labour of cultural representation than would be possible with either approach in isolation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Syncretism, Postcolonialism, and Cultural Resistance

The syncretism of cultures - the mixing, integration and reciprocal transformation of cultural practices, beliefs and identities - has been theorized in a number of disciplines as a means of survival and resistance for subaltern cultures. Robert Young's (1995) theory of colonial desire and cultural hybridity set the stage for understanding hybridity as both a by-product of colonial encounter and a resource for resistance to colonial domination. Bhabha's (1994) Third Space - the cultural space produced by colonial encounter in which fixed identities are destabilised and hybrid identities emerge that exceed and complicate the categories of the colonizer - is applicable to Siraj's representation of Sindhi syncretic identity, which was not created by colonial encounter but existed prior to it and provides the cultural resources for resisting the homogenising and simplifying impulse of the colonizer.

Bennett and Frow's (2008) Key Concepts in Cultural Analysis offers the methodological framework for understanding how cultural practices produce social identities, sustain communities, and generate the solidarity on which political action is based. Their definition of culture as 'a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general' (Bennett & Frow, 2008, p. 7) - including material practices, symbolic systems, institutional forms and experiences - allows us to analyse the multiple dimensions of the Sindhi syncretic culture that Siraj's novels represent. Importantly, Bennett and Frow (2008) argue that cultural practices are not just expressions of pre-existing social identities, but constitutive of them: communities are constituted and maintained through cultural practices, and therefore the disruption of cultural practices is not just a cultural nuisance but a political threat to the capacity of a community to act collectively and to self-determine.

Arjun Appadurai's (1990) theory of cultural flows - his account of the circulation of cultural forms across social and political boundaries that gives rise to new combinations and alliances - is relevant to understanding how Sindhi syncretic culture functions as a medium of connection across the tribal, caste and religious divides that imperial policies of divide-and-rule exploit. Appadurai's (1990) notion of 'ethnoscapes' - the landscape of group identities that is produced by the circulation of people, practices, and symbols - helps explain how Siraj presents Sindhi identity not as an essential quality but as a dynamic cultural identity that is produced through the collective practices of music, pilgrimage, festival, language, and craft.

Ejaz Ahmed's (1992) In Theory offers a valuable critique of postcolonial theories that celebrate cultural mixing and hybridity without reference to the material and political circumstances in which they are produced. Ahmad's call for cultural analysis to remain grounded in the specific historical experiences of colonized peoples is relevant to Siraj's trilogy: his trilogy does not celebrate Sindhi syncretism as an abstract philosophical ideal but as a product of the specific historical circumstances that led a people to discover, in their encounters with successive colonial powers, that the composite nature of their culture - its refusal to be reduced to a monolithic identity - was its greatest strength.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai and the Sufi Basis of Sindhi Syncretism

Any discussion of cultural syncretism in Siraj's trilogy must begin with the foundational philosophical insights of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689-1752), whose Shah Jo Risalo - the collected poems of Sindh's greatest classical poet - is the most profound philosophical expression of the syncretic vision that inhabits Siraj's fictional universe. In his English translation of the Risalo, Agha (2021) identifies four foundational principles that are articulated throughout Shah Latif's poetry: 'Universality of the human race and the interconnection of its parts; Basic equality of all human beings irrespective of their social status; Dignity of labour and continuity of effort to achieve progress in all spheres, material as well as spiritual; and Solidarity among different constituents of the society' (Agha, 2021, pp. 20–21). Universality, equality, dignity of labour and solidarity are the four principles that Siraj's fictional Sindhi communities embody and that colonial violence aims to eradicate.

The Sufi tradition embodied in Shah Latif is crucial to the understanding of Sindhi syncretism because it offers the spiritual and philosophical context in which the composite nature of Sindhi culture is not only accepted but celebrated. Sufi Islam in Sindh, with its focus on the inner spiritual life, its devotion to devotional poetry and music (qawwali), its organisation around shrines (dargahs) that draw people across religious lines, and its philosophy of the unity of being (wahdat al-wujud), provides the spiritual framework within which Muslims and Hindus, Syeds and artisans, scholars and farmers can engage in collective cultural practices that affirm their common humanity and shared connection with the land of Sindh. The Sufi syncretic tradition is represented in Siraj's trilogy as the most resilient medium of reproduction of Sindhi culture under colonialism.

The political implications of the four principles of the Sufi syncretic tradition - universality, equality, dignity of labour, and solidarity - are played out in all three of Siraj's novels. The principle of universality is embodied in the multi-religious nature of Sindhi community life: mosques and mandirs coexisting in the same neighbourhood, Muslims and Hindus sharing funerals and festivals, Akhund Saleh arbitrating the disputes of non-Muslim Sindhis as well as Muslims. The principle of equality is embodied in Shah Inayat Shaheed's commune and the Hari Haqdar movement of Parched Land, Wandering Clouds. The principle of dignity of labour is embodied in the figure of Sodhal the blacksmith - the craftsman-warrior whose social status is based on his productive labour on the resources of the land, not on his bloodline and wealth. And the principle of solidarity across social constituencies is embodied in the multi-tribal, multi-religious resistance movements in all three novels. The philosophical framework of Shah Latif's four principles helps us understand the underlying unity of the syncretic worldview that binds together the three novels of Siraj's trilogy, despite their distinct historical contexts.

Siraj and the Sindhi Literary Tradition

Sirajul Haq Memon (1933-2013) - better known by his pseudonym Siraj - is Sindhi literature's most important novelist. He was born in Tando Jam, Sindh, on October 24, 1933, educated at the University of Karachi, and joined the Pakistani civil service, from which he retired to pursue a literary career. He passed away on February 2, 2013 in Karachi after a literary career spanning half a century that encompassed novels, short stories, poetry, drama, linguistics, translations, autobiography and journalism. His trilogy of historical novels - Echo Is the Call (1970), Rendezvous with Death (1972) and Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (1988) - translated into English by his son Dr. Amjad Siraj Memon, is his major work and the subject of this paper.

Siraj's trilogy has received unanimous praise in the Sindhi literary canon. Dr. Fahmida Hussain's Foreword to Echo Is the Call (2015) notes that the trilogy 'created interest in the history of Sindh and encouraged the movement of romantic nationalism' and 'played important role in the popular resistance movements during and after the military rule of General Ziaul Haque' (p. 5). Khokhar (2022) places Siraj alongside other Sindhi writers who use historical fiction to create present-day anti-colonial awareness, while Jamil (2019) characterises the trilogy as "the most complete literary representation of Sindhi cultural identity across the colonial centuries" (p. 92). But no study has explored the trilogy's representation of cultural syncretism specifically in terms of the combined analytical framework of Belsey's textual analysis and Bennett and Frow's cultural analysis - the focus of the present paper.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on two analytical methods. First, Catherine Belsey's (2013) qualitative textual analysis which focuses on both what texts say and what they do: what the propositional content of literary passages is and what rhetorical, structural, and ideological work the passages perform. Belsey's (2013) method argues that formal features of literature (narrative, character, focalization, metaphor, irony, dialogue) are not merely decorative, but instrumental: they contribute to the meanings that texts generate and the ideological work those meanings do. Belsey's (2013) approach allows for a close reading of passages in Siraj's trilogy that construct, perform, and promote cultural syncretism as a political practice of anti-colonial resistance.

The second method is based on Bennett and Frow's (2008) cultural analysis that treats cultural practices as the constitutive practices of social identities and political collectivities. Bennett and Frow's (2008) approach facilitates an analysis of cultural practices (shrines, festivals, textiles, music, language, food) not just as incidental details in the novels but as the material and symbolic practices that sustain the composite identity of Sindhi communities and their ability to act politically. If Belsey's analysis of the text focuses on the formal aspects of the text, Bennett and Frow's analysis of cultural practices represented in the text allows for a reading that focuses on both the how and the what of Siraj's literary evocation of Sindhi syncretic culture.

The primary texts are the English translations of the trilogy's three novels: Echo Is the Call (Siraj, 2015), Rendezvous with Death (Siraj, 2017) and Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (Siraj, 2018) translated by Dr. Amjad Siraj Memon. These are complemented by the paratexts (Forewords, Author's Notes, Translator's Notes) that accompany each novel. The theoretical sources include Bhabha (1994), Bennett and Frow (2008), Appadurai (1990), Ahmad (1992), Fanon (1961) and the Sufi philosophical tradition as represented in Agha's (2021) annotated translation of Shah Jo Risalo.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

1. Mosques and Mandirs Together: Multi-Religious Solidarity as Syncretic Resistance

The most basic aspect of Siraj's trilogy on Sindhi syncretic culture is its multi-religious nature: the co-existence, respect and solidarity between Muslim and Hindu communities in the cultural space of Sindhi civilization. This multi-religious solidarity is not presented as an idealised unity but as a historical and political cultural phenomenon that the colonial regimes of the three novels recognise as a threat and attempt to suppress. Belsey's (2013) textual analysis method shows how Siraj embeds this multi-religious solidarity in the narrative itself - in the details of place, person, community life, and collective action that build up over the course of the three novels to create a coherent and politically significant portrait of Sindhi composite culture.

In Echo Is the Call (2015), the multi-religious solidarity of Sindhi society is particularly economical, established in one detail: after the murder of Roopo the puppeteer - a figure who staged Sindhi history and resistance for popular audiences across the region - his funeral 'was attended by everyone, Muslims, Hindus and the Buddhists. The entire village was there' (Siraj, 2015, p. 58). This sentence is politically suggestive. Roopo's murder is an act of colonial cultural violence: the Tarkhan administration murders the folk theater artist because his plays educate Sindhi people about their resistance. By staging the response to this colonial murder as a multi-religious act of collective grieving - Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists come together to mourn - Siraj encodes the political argument of the trilogy as a whole: it is precisely because of the composite, multi-religious nature of Sindhi community solidarity that the colonial project of cultural erasure is incomplete.

The importance of this multi-religious unity is underlined by the colonial administration's dread of it. Mirza Baqi's lament - 'non-muslims have become as courageous as to have their disputes resolved by Akhund Saleh rather than our Qazi courts' (Siraj, 2015, p. 90) - shows the recognition by the colonial administration that the Sufi scholar-figure's authority cuts across religious divides: non-Muslim Sindhis take their disputes to the Muslim scholar Akhund Saleh not because they have become Muslim or assimilated but because they see in him the embodiment of a tradition of justice that is common to all Sindhis regardless of their religious affiliation. The colonial administration's Qazi court, on the other hand, administers a justice that is structurally unjust - Sindhis hanged, Tarkhans exiled for the same crimes - and thus cannot win the trust of the non-Muslim population. The syncretic authority of Akhund Saleh, based on the principled universalism of Sufi tradition, is greater than the power of the colonial state because it transcends the religious divisions that the colonial administration seeks to create.

In Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (2018), this inter-religious fellowship is best developed in the backdrop of the Jhok Shareef festival - the annual gathering at the shrine of Shah Inayat Shaheed, the 18th century Sufi martyr who founded a commune on the principle that 'these lands belonged to the Creator and whoever tills the land has a right over it' (Siraj, 2018, p. 22). The festival is portrayed as gathering people from all across Sindh - 'people came in hordes, as if they might not get another chance to visit the shrine of Shah Inayat. The whole of Sindh had turned up' (Siraj, 2018, p. 19). Siraj's representation of the shrine of a Muslim Sufi martyr as a pan-Sindhi gathering, transcending religious, tribal and class divisions, is a physical manifestation of the 'solidarity among different constituents of the society' that Agha (2021, p. 21) defines as one of the core principles of the Sufi syncretic tradition. Bennett and Frow's (2008) conceptualisation helps us understand this: the festival is not just a religious ritual but a cultural practice that

constitutes Sindhi collective identity - that makes Sindh real as a collective reality through the shared experience of gathering, grieving for a shared martyr, and expressing shared political demands.

2. Textile, Language, and the Materiality of Syncretic Culture

Along with the inter-religious solidarity of shared rituals, Siraj showcases cultural syncretism through the material culture of everyday Sindhi life - the objects, practices and skills that Sindhi people use to reproduce their composite cultural identity in the most mundane and intimate aspects of their everyday lives. Here, the cultural analysis of Bennett and Frow (2008) is particularly useful: their emphasis that culture is not just constituted by beliefs and values, but also material practices, allows us to read the representation of Sindhi textiles, crafts, music and language in Siraj as assertions of cultural identity that are politically significant because they are embedded in the minutiae of everyday practice.

The most obvious and hotly contested site of syncretic cultural identity is language. The Tarkhan colonial administration's attempt to replace Sindhi with Persian is represented as an attack on the basis of Sindhi cultural composite identity: 'when a nation faces a curb on its language, it is time for them to sacrifice; because language is what gives a person his identity, humane nature and a forced foreign language deprives him from his natural behavior, it will give rise to an artificial and un-natural personality' (Siraj, 2015, p. 132). Sodhal's formulation - language as the medium of 'natural behaviour', forced language as the creation of "artificial and un-natural personality" - is a sophisticated one that anticipates by 16 years Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986) formulation in Decolonising the Mind. But Siraj's formulation adds to this a particularly syncretic inflection: the Sindhi language is not just the medium of the cultural identity of one community, but of a composite civilization - it is the language in which Muslims and Hindus, Sufis and farmers, artisans and scholars communicate their experiences, their histories and their political claims. To destroy the language is to destroy not only one culture but the medium of the composite soul of Sindh.

The Sindhi textile industry, especially the ajrak, the block-printed cloth that is the most iconic material artefact of Sindhi culture, is a recurrent syncretic material practice that evokes the composite nature of Sindhi culture. In Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (2018), the ajrak is repeatedly used both as an article of clothing and a cultural symbol: 'the middle aged man was wearing a cotton dress and his turban was made of ajrak' (Siraj, 2018, p. 53); 'Mehru was lying on the sheet completely wrapped by the ajrak' (Siraj, 2018, p. 78); 'he would buy two or three ajraks and shawls on his way back' (Siraj, 2015, p. 133). The ajrak's distinctive geometric designs in red and indigo colours combine Islamic geometric patterns and the dyeing practices of the Indus Valley civilization - it is a material object that embodies the syncretism of Sindhi culture in its design. When a Sindhi man wears an ajrak turban or a Sindhi woman wears an ajrak, they are enacting - in the most visceral way - the hybrid cultural identity that the colonial state aims to eliminate. Bennett and Frow's (2008) model of cultural practices shows the ajrak as a cultural practice in their technical sense: a material form that defines social identity and community membership through its consumption.

The folk theater of Roopo in Echo Is the Call (2015) is a third strand of the material culture of composite resistance. Roopo's natak-mandli (theater company) brings people from all religious, tribal and class backgrounds - 'hordes of men used to assemble in Roopo's small theatre which was always full' (Siraj, 2015, p. 58) - to watch plays that stage the history of Sindhi resistance over the centuries, and thus function as both popular entertainment, cultural education and political consciousness-raising. The particular subject matter of the plays - 'different eras from the history of Sindh, bringing tears to the eyes of the spectators' (p. 58) - is less significant than the role of the theater as a cultural space in which the composite community of Sindh (Muslims, Hindus, artisans, peasants) gather to affirm their collective identity as a people with a shared history and struggle. The murder of Roopo by the colonial administration is thus not just the killing of a cultural worker, but the killing of a cultural institution through which the public performance of Sindhi syncretic community identity takes place.

3. Sufi Shrines and the Sacred Geography of Syncretic Resistance

The Sufi shrine - the dargah of a deceased saint, the site of annual festivals and daily rituals - is in all three novels of the trilogy the key institution of Sindhi syncretic culture. The shrine is a sacred space, a social institution, a political forum, and a cultural archive - in one physical space, it embodies the composite nature of Sindhi civilization and its potential for inter-communal unity. Bhabha's (1994) notion of the Third Space is relevant here: the shrine is such a space, a place where religious, social and political identities are suspended in the experience of devotion, where Muslim and Hindu, intellectual and worker, male and female engage in cultural rituals that transcend and confuse the colonial markers of difference.

In Echo Is the Call (2015), the shrines of Thatta are a recurrent site of preservation of Sindhi cultural community in the face of Tarkhan colonialism. Sodhal's mental inventory of the elements of Sindh - 'shrines, its Sufis and saints' (Siraj, 2015, p. 32) - locates the shrine tradition at the heart of his conception of Sindhi culture. The seminary of Akhund Noor Muhammad, which is also a school, a site of Sufi devotional practice, and the headquarters of the resistance movement, is the most sophisticated institutional manifestation of the shrine tradition in the novel: it is the place where political resistance and Sufi devotional practice are inseparable, where the study of classical learning and the planning of armed rebellion are part of the same project of preserving Sindhi culture.

The shrine tradition is most fully developed in Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (2018) in the festival at Jhok Shareef, the shrine of Shah Inayat Shaheed, the early-eighteenth century Sufi martyr whose commune had instituted the principle of common land-ownership and whose hanging by the combined forces of the Mughal-Kalhora-feudal alliance established him as the martyr of the Sindhi syncretic resistance tradition. The festival at his shrine is presented as the biggest in Sindh (even bigger than the festival at Bhit, the shrine of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai) and its political dimension is immediately clear: this is where the Hari Haqdar (Peasants' Rights) organisation has its stall, where the protagonist Nooral first encounters the political analysis of Sindhi feudal-colonial oppression, and where the historical martyrdom of Shah Inayat is explicitly connected with the contemporary movement for peasants' rights. The shrine, as Siraj presents it, is not a religious institution but a cultural-political institution that keeps alive the memory of the past resistance and passes it on from one generation of Sindhi people to the next.

4. The Political Philosophy of Land-Belonging

The most fundamental dimension of Sindhi cultural syncretism in Siraj's trilogy is its foundation in a particular philosophy of land-belonging - the idea that the land of Sindh and the waters of the Sindhu River are a common inheritance that cuts across all other divisions of religion, tribe, caste, and class. This philosophy is not depicted as an abstract political ideology but as a concrete, embodied practice that manifests in the "work of the fields", the sharing of resources, and the resistance to those who seek to privatise, profit or destroy what belongs to all Sindhis in common. In Rendezvous with Death (2017), this philosophy of shared land-belonging is represented in the novel's impressive list of Sindhi communities - "the Abros, Shoros and Soomras… Jumejos and fishermen… Memons and Nangas, Lakhas and Mahesars… Muslims and Hindus and Jains" (Siraj, 2017, p. 180) - who join Sawan's resistance movement not because of a shared religious or ethnic identity, but because of a shared relation to the soil and waters of Sindh. The novel spells out the philosophical basis of this solidarity: 'the only relation they had was associated with the soil of Sindh and the waters of Sindhu that they shared as Sindhis. For them the relation between all Sindhis was as noble as the name of Sindh and Sindhu' (Siraj, 2017, p. 180). This is syncretism as political philosophy, not cultural tolerance: the shared relation to a certain land and its waters is a solidarity that is deeper than the other identities (religious, tribal, caste) that the colonial policy of divide and rule tries to exploit as sources of conflict.

The philosophical underpinnings of this land solidarity in Sufism are explicitly stated in Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (2018) in the account of Shah Inayat Shaheed's commune whose motto is quoted at the festival of Jhok Shareef: 'these lands belonged to the Creator and whoever tills the land has a right over it! His followers began to cultivate barren lands in this area. They shared the produce among themselves. There was no one to take a share of the crop' (Siraj, 2018, p. 22). Shah Inayat's commune is the most radical and most historically significant expression of the syncretic land-philosophy in the Sindhi tradition: it asserts the principle that the land is not the property of any individual, family, or community, but of God - and that this property of God, mediated through the dignity of the peasant, establishes a community of equals, regardless of religious, tribal, or caste distinctions. Shah Inayat's subsequent martyrdom at the hands of the Mughal-Kalhora-feudal alliance - the alliance of colonialism, indigenous collaborating class and religious orthodoxy - confirms his commune as the normative model of Sindhi syncretic resistance: a model of how the composite soul of Sindh, the soul that emerges from the shared experience of the land, can produce a form of political solidarity that terrifies the colonial state into violence.

The opposition between this syncretic land-philosophy and the colonial property regime established by various colonial regimes is one of the most acute and politically intense oppositions in the trilogy. If the syncretic land-philosophy holds that the land belongs to God and to those who labour on it - to be held in common and to be shared equitably among those who work the land - then the colonial property regime proclaims the private, legally sanctioned individual or collective ownership of the land that dispossesses workers of their labour. In Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (2018), this opposition is staged through the conflict between the ideology of the commune of Shah Inayat Shaheed - 'these lands belonged to the Creator and whoever tills the land has a right over it' (Siraj, 2018, p. 22) - and the feudal-colonial property system in which a landlord 'got what someone else earned' (Siraj, 2018, p. 22). The syncretic land-philosophy is not a spiritual ideal but a political agenda, which is recognised by colonial and feudal power as its greatest threat and which it responds to with the most extreme brutalities, including the martyrdom of Shah Inayat Shaheed.

The character of Sodhal in Echo Is the Call (2015) exemplifies this land-philosophy in its most intimate and sentimental guise. His famous contemplation of Sindh - when he shuts his eyes as he rides through the occupied city and feels "the entire beauty of Sindh pouring through" his chest (Siraj, 2015, p. 32) - is not a nationalist fantasy but a particular, sensory, composite experience of the land: "its river, the ocean, the forests, endless and priceless bounties of nature and my lovely and sweet Sindhi language; these mosques and mandirs, its folk art and music, its shrines" (p. 32). The composite nature of this vision - the simultaneous evocation of nature, language, religious diversity, folk culture, sacred geography - is inextricably linked to its political charge: it is because Sindh is composite - because it is home to mosques AND mandirs, Sufis AND farmers, folk art AND language - that it is a homeland worth dying for. A singular Sindh - a Sindh defined by one religion or one class or one tribe - would be a place. The composite Sindh, the syncretic civilization, is a homeland.

5. Women, Resistance and the Gendered Syncretism

There is a significant gendered dimension to Siraj's representation of syncretic cultural identity. In all three novels, women are not only depicted as victims of colonial violence, but as maintainers of syncretic cultural practice and as actors - in their own ways - in the resistance to colonial cultural erasure. This gendered aspect of cultural syncretism is highlighted by Bennett and Frow's (2008) emphasis that cultural practices are embedded within the social positions of those who engage in them: the cultural practices through which women sustain and pass on syncretic identity are not the same as those of men, but they are no less politically important.

In Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (2018), the women at the festival at Jhok Shareef share in the political awakening that Nooral experiences there: 'young women were also of the same view; they would gather at their homes and say such things about freedom that even the older women would respond: Damn them, if the British have been so barbarous, Dastagir will help us get rid of them!' (Siraj, 2018, p. 20). The women's use of the name of Dastagir - a Sufi saint revered across religious divides in Sindh - in their political discourse marks the syncretic nature of their political awakening: their resistance is articulated in the spiritual language of the Sufi tradition, linking personal spiritual devotion with political engagement in the distinctively Sindhi mode of devotional politics.

The character of Mehru in Parched Land, Wandering Clouds (2018) offers a gentle and culturally evocative portrait of syncretic identity in the trilogy. Her meeting Nooral, her love for him, her preoccupation with the minutiae of rural Sindhi life - getting up early in the morning, observing the colours of the sky, wrapping herself in her ajrak - are all portrayed as cultural practices that are both private and public, intimate and political. When she wraps herself in the ajrak - 'Mehru was lying on the sheet completely wrapped by the ajrak' (Siraj, 2018, p. 78) - she is engaging in an act of cultural self-representation that is, according to Bennett and Frow's (2008) formulation, constitutive of her identity as a Sindhi woman: the ajrak is not merely an accessory to her identity but it is a material practice that enables her to be a Sindhi woman.

Findings

The above analysis gives us five main points that collectively confirm the importance of Siraj's representation of cultural syncretism as anti-colonial resistance. First, in all three novels of the trilogy, Sindhi cultural syncretism is represented not as an inert cultural phenomenon but as a political practice: the composite nature of Sindhi identity - its multi-religious solidarity, its shared language and material culture, its Sufi-infused philosophy of land-belonging - is consciously mobilised by Siraj's characters as the main weapon against colonial efforts to fragment and homogenise Sindhi culture.

Second, in all three novels colonial violence is consistently directed at the syncretic core of Sindhi cultural identity: the Tarkhan administration targets the Sindhi language and the multi-religious authority of Akhund Saleh; the Mughal administration targets the tribal and communal solidarity of the resistance movement; the British-feudal alliance targets the shrine-based land solidarity that Shah Inayat Shaheed's commune had established. The persistence of this colonial anti-syncretic policy in three different colonial regimes suggests Siraj's historical insight that the colonial domination of Sindh has always depended on the annihilation of Sindhi composite culture, that syncretism is acknowledged by colonialism as its most formidable enemy.

Third, the Sufi tradition, in the form of shrine institution, devotional poetry of Shah Latif, pedagogic practice of Akhund Noor Muhammad, and the martyrdom of Shah Inayat Shaheed, is the philosophical and institutional medium through which Sindhi syncretism is most effectively sustained and communicated in all three novels. The Sufi tradition does not produce Sindhi syncretism but it gives it its most profound philosophical basis, its most stable institutional expression and its most powerful political language.

Fourth, the material culture of Sindhi syncretic identity - language, ajrak textile, folk music and theatre, the architectural fabric of "mosques and mandirs" - is not merely decorative local colour in all three novels, but politically charged cultural practice, in the sense of Bennett and Frow (2008): these material practices constitute and sustain the composite community of Sindh, and are therefore politically destroyed by colonial violence.

Fifth, Siraj's representation of syncretic resistance is theoretically sophisticated in anticipating some of the key insights of postcolonial theory: Bhabha's (1994) Third Space, Appadurai's (1990) cultural flows, and Ahmad's (1992) materialist critique of cultural essentialism are all anticipated in the novels' representation of Sindhi composite identity as a dynamic, historically constructed, politically engaged cultural category that refuses the essentialist categories of both colonialism and nationalist ideology.

CONCLUSION

Siraj's historical trilogy affirms the enduring nature of cultural syncretism as the most important and deepest form of anti-colonial resistance in Sindh - more important than military resistance, more enduring than political resistance, more philosophically subtle than nationalist ideology. The composite soul of Sindh - 'these mosques and mandirs, its folk art and music, its shrines, its Sufis and saints, its healers and farmers, its labourers and blacksmiths' - is not only what Sindhis love but what they defend and die for: it is the composite nature of their civilization that makes it worth preserving and the destruction of its composite nature that makes colonialism most deeply destructive.

The twin application of Belsey's (2013) textual analysis and Bennett and Frow's (2008) cultural analysis has allowed a reading of the trilogy that is simultaneously sensitive to the formal literary strategies that Siraj adopts in representing syncretic culture and to the cultural practices themselves that constitute the composite identity he is representing. This combined approach enables us to see that in Siraj's novels, syncretism is not just a theme - not just something the novels are about - but a formal principle that underpins the novels' narrative strategies: the catalogues of communities, the accumulation of cultural details, the polyphonic representation of multiple viewpoints across religious, tribal and class divides are themselves formal enactments of the syncretic vision the novels celebrate.

The usefulness of Bennett and Frow's (2008) cultural analysis for the purposes of this paper needs to be acknowledged. Their emphasis on the constitutive role of cultural practices in social identities - on the way that communities are constituted and sustained by the practices of material life, not just by beliefs or ancestry - allows a reading of Siraj's trilogy that avoids romanticizing Sindhi syncretic identity as pure, timeless, or essential. In Siraj's depiction, Sindhi syncretism is always historical, always tied to specific material practices (the ajrak, the shrine festival, the folk theater, the Sufi seminary), and always under threat from those - colonial bureaucrats, feudal landlords, orthodox religious leaders - who seek to replace it with a more easily dominated, more homogeneous, more easily governed cultural form. Bennett and Frow's (2008) insight thus allows the paper to read Siraj's syncretism not as a romantic nationalist affirmation of the uniqueness of Sindhi culture but as a historical, materialist, and political account of how composite cultures maintain their identity and their solidarity in the face of colonial oppression.

This analysis has three implications. For the field of postcolonial literary studies, the trilogy places Sindhi syncretic culture in the global theoretical debate about cultural hybridity, composite identity, and the politics of cultural practice. For Sindhi literary studies, the analysis reveals the deep philosophical depth of Siraj's historical fiction and its continuity with the classical Sindhi literary tradition of Shah Latif Bhittai. For the contemporary politics of culture in Pakistan and South Asia, the trilogy presents a historically and philosophically sophisticated case against the homogenizing impulses of both colonial and postcolonial nationalism - a case for the political significance of cultural diversity, composite identity, and the solidarity of difference. As Siraj's Author's Note to Echo Is the Call puts it, quoting the Persian verse: 'from time to time, revisit this old tale afresh' (Siraj, 2015, p. 12). The tale of Sindh's composite soul is still as relevant today as it was in the 16th century when the Tarkhans first sought to silence it.

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