Original Article

Business, Family, and Frontier: Reading Family Histories of Frontier Business Community

JHSS
28-50

Vol. 32 (1), 2024

Faiz Ali[1] Tasleem Malik[2]

Abstract

Family histories of the frontier business community constitute a genre on the interstices of history and literature. They offer resources for and sites of reimagining frontier scholarship, the northwest frontier in this case. They represent the voices of those frontier communities who, despite having a critical role in the social, political, and economic history of the colonial frontier, have remained mainly excluded or left to low margins. Literature from and regarding such communities has yet to be addressed and is limited in scope and scholarship. To bring 'commercial' construction of frontier, this paper undertakes a critical reading of five selected texts exploring three aspects - context, nature, and contribution of these works. The study concludes that such indigenous narratives constitute useful sources for and offer insights into future research on the significant role of commercial communities in critical reading and understanding of the colonial frontier.

Keywords: Frontier, history, business, family, community, colonial, close reading.

Introduction

Popular and scholarly works in the fields of family and business histories have grown significantly around the world, though only a little in the case of the northwest frontier of the colonial period. Family histories of the frontier business community constitute a genre on the interstices of history and literature. Such works offer resources for, and sites of, reimagining frontier

[1] Faiz Ali is PhD scholar at NIPS, QAU, Islamabad and can be reached at alifaizy@yahoo.com
[2] Tasleem Malik is an Assistant Professor, Centre for International Peace and Stability (CIPS), National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Islamabad. tasleem.malyk1982@gmail.com

scholarship. Family histories have remained neglected and limited in scope, yet such texts have emerged, opening up space for revisiting critical debates of frontier scholarship. Such works have come up from politically significant communities of frontier bearing critical colonial function of indigenous trade and finance. Five such texts have been selected for study.[3]

The study highlights that these indigenous narratives offer insights into the critical role of communities in the construction of, and therefore, a better understanding of, the frontier. It is made possible by providing for missing voices and grounded and granulated histories of the diverse and differentiated colonial frontier. The selected texts evoke the subjective worlds of personal and familial relations and implications with broader spheres of political and economic worlds, colonialism and capitalism, ethnonationalism, and nation-state, particularly in making frontier history, as a two-way process. Works taken up in this paper for critical reading provide an opportunity to better understand frontier history, community, and commerce.

To bring 'commercial' construction of the frontier, this paper closely reads five selected texts of family history produced by frontier business communities, both Hindu and Muslim, and related to both parts of the northwest frontier–north and south. Produced post-colonially, these works deal with a wider spectrum of pre- to post-colonial periods, yet the colonial period remains the scope of the paper. The study explores three areas—context, nature, and contribution—of these works of family history. Discussion on context includes writers' biographies, book histories, and regional communities. The section on nature covers major themes and textual analysis. Finally, the contribution of the works to frontier scholarship has been explored. The study brings up non-traditional research subjects, emphasizes the importance of local narratives, and foregrounds the voices of the communities in the research stream being the research subject.

[3] Ailawadi, J. (2005). *Hamara Dera Ismail Khan: Tasveer-e- Ashiana*, Engl. tr. Ram Narain Bhattia, Shobha Ram Laul. Bagai, S. M. (2007). *The Lives and History of Dera Bagais: The Bagais of Dera Ismail Khan*. *(No Title)*. Faiz, A. (2009). *Parachagan*. Hashmi Publications. Jamal, NR. (2015). *Paracha: HM Habibullah*. Millennium Media. Sethi, Y. (2020).
Peshawar ka Sethi Khandan, Gandhara-Hindko Academy

Selected texts examined in this study constitute basic texts, while this paper uses other primary and secondary sources. Techniques and textual and historical analysis strategies have been employed using both Close Reading and new historicist approaches (Greenblatt & Payne, 2005). The work largely remains within the interpretive tradition and is exploratory in nature.

Frontier histories on the religiopolitical spectrum contained rudimentary elements of family history, as did colonial ethnographic works on Pashtun tribes (Nichols, 2017). Subcontinental literature on business communities, as Marwaris, Gujratis, Parsis in India (Tripathi, 1984; Roy, 2018), and Shikarpuris and Hyderabadis in Sind (Markovits, 2000) also contain strands of family history, as works on (auto)biography, oral history, and entrepreneurial-inspirational literature of 'struggle and success' genre (Bhojwani, 2006; Saqib, 2016). Partition research and archives largely attended community and focused on family only marginally (Kaur, 2007; Guhathakurta, 1998). These works offer broader insights for this study. This paper also utilizes critical works on family history, memory, nostalgia, narrative and construction of the past which addresses the process of private memory constituted as public through recrafting and realigning with broader public discursive fields or grand narratives as religion, nation and colonialism (Foucault, 1984; Greenblatt & Payne, 2005; Anderson, 1995; Tannock, 1995; Bhabha, 2003; Sleeter, 2020; Boncori & Williams, 2023).

Despite the 'explosion of family history' (Ryan, 1982), the fetish of individuals in South Asia still capitalizes on both traditional historiography and auto-fiction. Demographic, sentiment, and household economics constitute three broad approaches to family history (Anderson, 1995), besides those of periodization as intergenerational and life cycle. Selected texts reveal some elements of these approaches besides those of colonial ethnography.

Family provides the context for individual and collective action, which is the subject of history and human knowledge. It also functions as a source and site of heritage and its oral and material transmission. There has been growing recognition of family and community as shaping factors, as Greenblatt says: "I recognize now that even free choices are shaped by overarching family and social strategies" (Greenblatt & Payne, 2005). Scholars have also emphasized "the special relevance of family history for Partition studies" for conceptual

and empirical reasons (Guhathakurta, 1998, p. 127). “To focus on the family as an important intermediary site is to see how memories of individuals and generations are constructed and negotiated, and how personal identities of gender, class or nation are formed, conformed to, or contested and confronted” (p. 127). Bayly used the native family as a basic unit both for peasant farms and business firms (Bayly, 1988), but family history couldn’t develop into an interdisciplinary field.

Family histories are constituted in and through memory and nostalgia. Memories are negotiated and appropriated to make narratives in the text. Memories are not objects lying there but constitute social discursive practices that, through crafting and recrafting, reveal historicity, contingency, and provisionality. Production and circulation of memory have been conceptualized by Astrid Erll (2011) as a form of collective memory. Erll also refers to the multiple ways memories of family are related to those of national. Though Milan Kundera (2020) asserted that “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (p.1), family and national memories reveal more complex relations than binary ones. Nostalgia, though a dominant motif of all family histories in this paper, particularly becomes the hallmark of memories of those communities displaced by the Partition. Nostalgia is the feeling of a gap produced through a positive past with a deficient present (Tannock, 1995). Tannock also notes that “… the nostalgic author asserts a sense of continuity over and above her sense of separation, and from this continuity may be able to replenish a sense of self, of participation, of empowerment, belonging, righteousness or justification, direction” (p. 456).

“… the ‘unhomely’” in Homi Bhabha “is a paradigmatic postcolonial experience” (Bhabha, 2003, p. 367); this particularly defines Dera diaspora literature included in this study. Muslim texts in the paper are equally ‘unhomely’ and therefore postcolonial: they are surrounded largely and overwhelmingly by sublime memory and transcendental cartography of Muslim imperia invoked and signified by poets like Iqbal, as Hindu family history eagerly traces identity with lost ancient Hindu kingdoms constituting an ideological imperial sphere. Bringing power as central to family histories, Sleeter (2020) considers it critical to focus on “Who else (what other groups) was around, what were the power relationships among groups, how were

these relationships maintained or challenged over time, and what does all this have to do with our lives." Boncori and Williams (2023) particularly address the absence of women's perspectives in otherwise masculine narratives of family histories.

The issue of convergence of fiction and history also emerges as critical in these texts, reminding of what Orhan Pamuk, a Noble Laureate, says while speaking of Dag Solstad's novel "Shyness and Dignity: "You wonder if the author experienced these things or did, he invent them, and that ambiguity is very compelling" (Fox, 2023). The relation and tensions between the two genres are constitutive of the selected works and make them 'compelling' readings and sources for frontier historiography and frontier literature on partition, diaspora, and migration. The study finds the works at "the intersection of the historical and the literary" and therefore concedes to "the mutual permeability of the literary and the historical" (Greenblatt & Payne, p. 2).

Contexts of the Book Production

This section highlights the contexts of the selected works, including writers' biographies, book histories, and regional contexts.

Writers' Biographies. Stephen Greenblatt iterates on the role of the present in the construction of the past. "… it is not possible to transcend one's own historical moment; all histories are themselves historically contingent on the present in which they are constructed" (Greenblatt & Payne, 2005, p. 3). Foucault (1984) also considers that "The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" (p. 107). Selected history texts have been written by insiders, being members of the family, delivering the burden of presenting the family with its historical significance, and defending (and even creating) distinct places for their families. None of the writers is a professional historian and has not used imperial archives and local narratives of the frontier to supplement their work, a task left to scholars such as S.M. Hanifi (2011). This is despite the fact that writers such as Younus exhibited literary and historical sensibility in their works.

Instead of engaging in trade like his ancestors, Younus Sethi (1922-2000) served in Radio Broadcasting, the Pakistan Information Ministry, and the Pakistan Embassies at Kabul and Tehran. His work was published by his son, Saleem Sethi, a civil servant. Ashraf Faiz retired as lieutenant colonel from the Pakistan Army, and his work was inspired by his father's works, a newspaper publisher, and the colonial gazetteer tradition. Nazli Jamal (1956) graduated in literature from Iowa and Scotland and had a career in English teaching and educational development, besides engaging in family business. Her protagonist is her grandfather, who served as Karachi's mayor. This family had been close to President Ayub Khan, PM Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and his daughter, PM Benazir Bhutto. Reviewing her work, Sumbal (2023) noted that "… despite her obvious awe of her paternal grandfather, the author has not tried to paint him as an idol. Although the book is … a labor of love, Jamal has depicted him as a real-life character: a powerful, ambitious man with foibles and failures."

Surender Mohan Bagai (or SM Bagai) (1928-n.d.) was born and bred in Delhi. He didn't live in Dera, to which his parents had themselves belonged. His career in the Indian Revenue Service spanned from 1953 to 1989, and he served as State Vigilance Commissioner of Nagaland. His cousin, Atul Bagai from the Indian Administrative Service, wrote its Foreword. Nachiketa (2007) reports that the book took shape in six years and with the help of Dolly Nanda (nee Bagai). Jaswant Ram Ailawadi (1890-1973) was a schoolteacher when he left Dera at the time of Partition. He also wrote other pedagogical works.

These works have been produced in postcolonial states. The colonial period and partition were personally witnessed by three writers—Sethi, Bagai, and Ailawaid, as the parents of the other two writers did. "Two levels of memorial recall operate here: the elders remembering what had happened, and the adult author remembering them remembering" (Kabir, 2004, p.173). Anaya Kabir (2004), while referring to Meera Syal's novel "*Anita and Me*" further notes that "Within (Meera) Syal's narrative, however, post-memory belongs to neither the public nor the personal sphere, but to an alternative community space that is somewhere in between a reconstituted Punjabiness that exists behind closed suburban doors" (p.173).

Book Histories. Production and circulation of historical works provide for their canonical valuation and legitimacy, which come from biblio-scholarly circuits and controls, including writers, publishers, readers, reviewers, critics, librarians, and later researchers. Forms of self-publishing produced the texts under study, which were considered non-traditional, low in this hierarchy, and therefore generally excluded from scholarly circuits (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013; Furst, 2019). Such works still offer space to the excluded. Literature on self-publishing addresses bibliographic controls, library practice, losses to the publishing industry, and reading cultures (Holley, 2015), but not on personal investments and informal circulation nodes of self-publication in South Asia.

Nazli Jamal, despite her resourcefulness, got her work published by Millenium Media, an advertising rather than publishing entity. Her publisher still enjoys a better place in outreach. Sethi's book was published by Gandhara-Hindko Academy Peshawar, a small local organization promoting Hindko literature. Though originally publisher-driven and printed in *The Frontier Post* serially, Ashraf's work was produced in book form by a small local concern, Hashmi

Publications, Rawalpindi, as was the English version of Ailawadi's work by Shobha Ram Laul, New Delhi. *Dera Bagai* is, however, expressly self-published.

Reception of published works also indicates the grids and planes of their circulation and valuation. Both *Dera Bagai* and *Paracha Habibullah* were produced and received largely in elite environments through celebratory book launch events and media coverage. Another *derawal* book on colonial memories of the community, in and through cuisine, also garnered elite and even global reception: it was by Pushpa, Atul Bagai's mother (Bagai, 2014; Beijing Book Fair, 2014). Jamals' work has been published twice: in 2015 and 2022. Its Foreword and Introduction also reveal the social capital of her family, as these were written by Jamsheed Marker, a prominent Pakistani envoy, and Kamal Azfar, a lawyer, development leader, and Governor of Sind province. All these selected texts have remained excluded from dominant discourses of epistemic communities despite some marginal and transitory visibility of two works by Nazli and Bagai.

Dera Bagai was self-published in 2007 as a 383-page book. Bagai family members made visits to Dera during the mid-1990s and 2000s, a process made possible through political narratives of 'people to people' contact and further facilitated by the UNEP assignment of the writer's cousin - Atul Bagai, who himself visited Dera in 2003 during UNDP Conference held in Islamabad (Dera Bagai, 2007; Nachiketa, 2013). Derawal's connection across borders has been productive in both writing and documentaries. Different imperatives drove this change, including growing mobility in a globalizing world, oral history projects involving the diaspora, the Seraiki movement, and a transitory shift of secular representations over religious/ideological ones in Pakistan as a consequence of the 'war on terror' enabling "people to people contact" across borders. This work thus comes as a result of such regional, global, ideological, and technological shifts. Atul Bagai, in and through UN's discursive technologies of regional cooperation, appears to be not only a critical node in the grids of (re)production but also circulation of Dera diaspora narratives, both genealogical and culinary, one by his cousin and other by his mother respectively. SM Bagai's narrative of the postcolonial reconstruction of his family is the refugee narrative of "Punjabi self-reliance and industry," with little role in official accounts of rehabilitation, as notes Ian Talbot (2011, p.110).

Hamara Dera Ismail Khan by Jaswant Ram Ailawadi was titled "Tasveer-eAshyana" when it was originally published in Urdu from India in 1952. Its English translation by Ram Narain Bhattia came with its 224-page first print in 2005 under the title of "Hamara Dera Ismail Khan—Tasveer-e-Ashyana" (hereby referred to as "*Hamara Dera*"). This paper is based on its English version.

"*Peshawar ka Sethi Khandan*" (*Sethi Family of Peshawar*) was written by Muhammad Younus Sethi in Urdu and left with his family as a manuscript. Gandhara-Hindko Academy Peshawar published it in 2020 as a 112-page book. The work is a product of 'collective authorship' as Saleem Sethi made some additions to the manuscript regarding the original writer and later family members. Cultural contact during Younus' stay in Kabul and Tehran and his advocacy of the culture and history of newly created Pakistan was largely informed by shared cultural spheres of Muslim imperia, in which circulation of Sethi helped produce his historical and literary works. This

shared cultural sphere served as original and foundational for the identity and ideology of Pakistan, in whose (re)production Sethi himself participated through his role in the Ministry of Information and Culture. As enumerated in his family history, his work was also inspired by welfare works in the frontier and Afghanistan by his trader-ancestors, particularly Karim Bakhsh Sethi. These works were invoked as material markers of his family instead of greed and profit.

Parachagan by Ashraf Faiz was originally published in English as a serial in the *Frontier Post* (Faiz, 2009) and translated into Urdu in 2009 by Tariq Faiz, a civil servant and Ashraf Faiz's brother. His work was initially published by Rehmat Shah Afridi, who was the owner of this left-leaning newspaper and himself a Pushtun entrepreneur. At the same time, his tribesmen were colonially considered local traders. His attachment to the anti-colonial frontier history and frontier trade communities influenced Ashraf Faiz to undertake the postcolonial construction of his trade community, as is acknowledged in the book's Introduction. Ashraf Faiz's father, Faiz Muhammad Paracha, has also authored some books, including one outlining regional branches of the Paracha community. Ashraf also participates in the colonial gazetteer tradition to which he was exposed through his military career and civil service connections of the family.

Regional Contexts and Communities. A sizable presence existed of what historians term 'Peshawari Muslim merchants' in the northwest frontier (Markovits, 2000). This merchant community had been circulating within cultural-commercial spheres of Muslim imperia (Muslim princely states of Afghanistan, Persia, Central Asia, and even British India) with greater ease than their commercial counterparts, non-Muslims. Its historical significance lies in its location on the intersection of vast Muslim imperial geographies. Peshawar was privileged as a major trade entrepot in the colonial frontier owing to the Khyber-Kabul connection, or what Hanifi (2011) terms the colonial "Kabul Hypothesis."

A sizeable Hindu population lived in Dera city, as in Bannu city, and also dominated Dera in terms of public life, trade, and modernity. Other Hindus in the frontier were a tiny minority, including those in Peshawar. Dera has long been considered the cultural capital of the frontier. Dera in Bagai history

emerges in and through Hindu representation and still functions as a model of collective and co-existing communal life.

Dera is known for Gomal Pass, which had long been used as a major trade route than Khyber during the pre-colonial period. Dera was the main trade entrepot for the Powinda trade, descending both from Baluchistan and Gomal itself and served as the first major trade center for both streams of trade to and from Kabul and Qandhar. In this paper, D.I. Khan has been taken as 'Dera' as is popular amongst the '*Derawals*' themselves, both Dera residents and their descendants, including the diaspora.

Nature of the Texts

Homi Bhabha (2003), in his "The World and the Home," invokes the responsibility of the critic "to fully realize… the un-spoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (p. 373). In this study, not only are texts seen to bring up such 'pasts' of business communities from the colonial frontier, but they also make legible and heard histories and voices of otherwise invisible, silenced, and erased groups. This section deals with the main themes taken up in the books and provides a textual analysis of the structure and style of the selected works.

Sethi Family of Peshawar. *Sethi Family of Peshawar* has been divided into seven chapters. The first three chapters deal with Peshawar history, origins, and early history of the Sethi family since its migration from Bhakkar in Punjab to finally settling down in Peshawar, and then prominent personalities before the rise of this family in the colonial period for its cross-border trade, particularly with Central Asia. The following three chapters deal with the rise of the Sethi family during the colonial period, with Karim Bakhsh Sethi as the main character of the Sethi family in this climax, and his two sons with their histories spanning the last decades of the colonial and some decades of the postcolonial period. The last chapter covers details of generations in the postcolonial period and the details regarding two related families, Fazal Ilahi Gurrwara and Khawaja Sultan.

Though the Sethi family belonged to the trade community, this family gained its climax under Karim Bakhsh Sethi (1860-1930) for his cross-border trade extending towards Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as inside British

India. Karim Bakhsh developed close relations with the British, thus awarding him titles of Khan Bahadur and OBE (Order of the British Empire). However, the family suffered serious commercial setbacks and crises during his lifetime, mainly owing to the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which had consequences in Central Asia in the 1920s. His sons, however, continued trade despite serious challenges. The writer notes that the Sethi family has moved to other occupations, such as army, civil service, medicine, and other employment. However, many in the family continued business and trade as their ancestral occupation. Yet, they lost colonial significance in trade and business in the region.

The writer of *Sethi Family* attempts to construct the family in relation to the challenging nature of frontier politics. The family, which has its old Punjabi origins, is non-Pushtun and Peshawar-based. On one side, it places the family in close proximity to the original moments of the new nation-state through the participation of, and support by, its family members in the political struggle for independence. On the other hand, it also identifies with the aspirations of the Pushtun population by moral support of the anti-colonial political struggles of Red Shirts and tribal warriors, by philanthropic support of the needy tribal people suffering colonial oppression, and by promoting Pushtun literature through its Urdu translation.

Parachagan. *Parachagan* has been divided into six chapters and three appendices, besides pictures and maps. The first chapter engages with the origins of the word 'Paracha.' The second chapter brings to light multiple perspectives and debates on ethnic identification and the origins of the community. The following three chapters deal with the language, religion, race, occupation, and lifestyle of the Paracha community. The sixth chapter is the conclusion and summarizes the discussions in previous chapters, with the assertion of the writer's claims for a distinct social status and ethnic origins amongst other frontier and Punjabi Muslim business communities. Three appendices in the book deal with the colonial perspective on the community, a colonial report on Makhad, a commercial colony associated historically with Parachas, and the relation of the Paracha community with trade and economy.

The writer asserts the Afghani/Persian origins of the community, claiming its ancient Muslim identity against other Muslim business communities of frontier and Punjab who converted to Islam very recently in history. This particularly comes in opposition to other and dominant populations – Pashtuns - with distinct claims of race and ethnicity. However, there had been affinities with Pushtun culture, even if not its ethnicity, amongst Parachas of the northwest frontier, mainly through situating Makhad, a commercial colony on the Indus, within a Pushtun cultural context. Business practices, history, and circulatory networks are discussed in the book but are very briefly scattered across the pages. There appears to be a struggle in the text to carve out a distinct identity for the Paracha community based on its ethnicity, ancientness, early conversion to Islam, non-Indian/non-Hindu-ness, abhorrence to usury-based finance for trade, and above all, contestation of colonial construction of Parachas as hawkers or rural shopkeepers.

The writer also creates a distinct identity of Parachas through its social organization, customs, and traditions related to marriage, family, residential infrastructure, and other identity markers and materialities. Architecture does appear as a distinct materiality of community identity, circulated through images in the book as well. Yet, there is not any specific architectural sample preserved for posterity exhibiting family identity, commercial power, and artistic tastes, as is the case with other Peshawari business family Sethis.

Paracha: HM Habibullah. Though structured around the person of Habibullah Paracha and organized as his biography by the writer, it unfolds the characters of the family and also gives, in the end, details about his progeny, termed by the writer as 'Habib's clan' instead of the general Paracha family, thus carving a distinct place out of the broader community of Parachas.

The biography of Habibullah Paracha has been divided into three main parts. The first part deals with Habibullah's earlier life, family, Paracha community, life at Makhad, childhood, education, and training. This part leads to his adventure to Peshawar and Bukhara via Afghanistan. It also explores his three marriages, commercial circulations, Russian expansion and changes in Central Asia owing to the Bolshevik Revolution, his displacement and then relocation to Persia, and aspirations for a political career starting with a local

'*kursinasheen'* Part two deals with his business adventure to the Far East, first in China and then in Japan, and his dislocations and struggles towards Amritsar and Kashmir during World War II. Part three engages with his trade journeys with Japan and Hong Kong, his entrepreneurship career in manufacturing, and others. This also covers his political career, mainly starting with his becoming Mayor of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, his intermediary efforts for release of Benazir Bhutto during the Zia regime, and other commercial and political ventures. In addition to these three parts, the book also includes some details regarding Habibullah, his community and family, and his ancestral site. Habibullah's story of commercial adventures takes the readers to the lands of Afghanistan, Central Asia, Russia, Iran, mainland India, China, Japan, and Pakistan after Independence.

Dera Bagai. "*The Lives and History of Dera Bagais***"** (or briefly *Dera Bagai*) has fourteen chapters and twelve appendices. One chapter is an article on Dera history by Ravi Nangia, which traces pre-Islamic Hindu origins of Frontier and Punjab generally and of Hindu South and Buddhist North divided by Kotal Pass between Kohat and Peshawar. With the interlude of Muslim rule, it returns to the rise of Hindu officers of administration and revenue (governors and *kardars* or *diwans*) under Nawab of Dera or Sikhs, and their descendants in the British revenue department. The lineage of *diwans* included historically known names of Diwan Manak Rai Gorwara and then his contemporary Diwan Lakhi Mal, succeeded by his son Diwan Daulat Rai and grandson Diwan Jaggan Nath. History of *Dera Bagai* explores origins: ancestors, original hometowns, castes, and etymological traces of family from India to Russia. After introducing early ancestors, *Dera Bagai* sketches near ancestors in the Sikh period extending to the early colonial period. SM Bagai then develops genealogical tables and maps and embarks on the journey of describing and constructing life histories of families on both male and female sides. As a story of modernity, it introduces the Dera Hindu community and its role in the new Dera city, education, municipality, river embankment, bazar improvements, etc.

Dera Bagai is also a story of the production of a community and locality in and through such modernity, woven through the textures of an extended family growingly engaged in diverse occupations. The book also gives insights into the religious and social life of Hindu men and women while

briefly referring to the only Muslim ward composed of artisans (particularly noisy utensil makers) and cart men. This history of the Bagai family opens up a spectacle of its relations with other Hindu families related through matrimony or otherwise and spread across the frontier, Punjab, and mainland India. It also highlights circulatory grids of religious life through the pilgrimage economy involving family visits to Hardwar and Ganga. This work offers an elite perspective, like Nazli, marginalizing the presence of both Muslims and other Hindus in Dera.

Hamara Dera. Though *Hamara Dera* is largely about the region of Dera as a home to the Hindu business community, it provides details of the business community as well as Hindu business families engaged in trade, business, and finance in and around Dera. The book covers the history of Dera from ancient Hindu times to precolonial Durrani and Sikh rules and then the British. It presents a profile of Jaggan Nath, who has long served Dera on the municipal committee and board. The author then brings to discussion the political history of the frontier through communal and Congress politics with Bacha Khan and the role of the British (as Roos-Kepple and Olaf Caroe) in communally patronizing Pashtuns. It discusses administrative issues of separating the frontier from Punjab and the merger of Dera with it after separating it from Punjab's areas of Leia and Bhakkar.

Then, the book allocates a significant portion to religious and cultural life – mainly Hindu but also shared spaces and practices—through details of prominent personalities, architecture, and practices, including fairs and festivals. A chapter on education—modern, Hindu religious, for both girls and boys, besides one for specially-abled students, has been included, presenting colonial Dera as advanced in education, mainly by efforts of the local trade community. However, government-sponsored Mission School had been there since the 1860s. It also gives gazetteer-style ethnographic details of population, climate, productions, trade, and markets.

Close Reading

Using techniques and strategies of Close Reading supplemented with a new historicist approach, this section deals with narrative structure, template, style, and related aspects of critical textual analysis of the selected texts. In

these texts, one can see a 'collapse of distinction' in Jameson's terms (Jameson, 1991) of history, memory, orality, (auto)biography, family records, and artifacts (latter as photos, maps, illustrations, and drawings). These writings primarily originate in orality and memory: writers used methods of interviews – both recorded or memorized. However, none of the writers are professionals in oral history; rather, they developed based on available repertoires and resources of family memory. Written sources have been used mostly to supplement the works, as in Sethi and Nazli. Still, Ashraf Faiz and Bagai have used these written and secondary sources as their main methodology in search of their 'origins' and in Ashraf Faiz for constructing his ethnographic production of family customs, habitat, and cultural practices. But orality and memory constituted an overwhelming method and source of the construction of these works.

The selected texts are what Meghna Guhathakurta (1998) calls "The 'insider's account' of memories" (p. 128). The central motif of these narratives is the "colonial glory" of these elite business families - Sethi, Bagai, and Nazli Jamal particularly signify this, though Ashraf, too, participates in it. Sethi and Bagai's families mainly lost their business glory during the colonial period, even though many of their families continued to operate in the business world. While reviewing oral history collections, Victor Geraci (2005) highlights "recurring thematic motifs centered on the longing for the good old days on the farm, the merits of the hard life, a sense of community, the strength of family, the bonds of ethnic heritage, and the importance of education for upward mobility. …. common ground in their endeavors to clarify the lives of lesser-known participants" (p. 62) in history. He further notes that "practiced memories (archival memory), … are filtered through past personal memories that are not "pure recall" (Geraci, 2005, p. 64).

Nostalgia, political and personal, is produced through the affective textures of the works. Bagai's work is about the signification of nostalgia for the 'colonial glory' of family and the loss of its ancestral homeland and fortunes. Ailawadi's work, though, invokes the 'pre-eminence' of the Hindu community in colonial Dera; this 'pre-eminence' is also driven by nostalgia. Such discursive and psychic investment in reclaiming the 'golden past' of the family is to resurrect emotional resources for a better place in refugee

rehabilitation, at least socially, when the appellation of 'sharnarthi' (refugee) had become derogatory (Gulati, 2013). Ailawadi's signification of elaborate religious spaces, architecture, and practices is to gain social status as true servants of Hinduism, as those who celebrated it in Hindu dominant locality of otherwise Muslim majority Punjab and Frontier. Thus, nostalgia – private and familial - had a decisive function in postcolonial constructions of the community. The writers produce nostalgia through the construction of, and an appeal to, humanizing the fate of families, which otherwise are socially produced through distance, distrust, and even hatred in the public imagination. Dera Hindu texts particularly deploy this strategy of hiding popular imaginaries against commercial communities by constructing anti-Hindu riots as 'communal' rather than anti-*banya*. It is yet to be seen how these familial discursive investments produce a different South Asia as an affective sphere than power spheres envisaged and endeavored by nation-states.

Family histories in this study follow dual tiers and layers of storylines. One is external, public, and regional, as it covers pre- to post-colonial periods, though each has its own differentiations: precolonial into ancient Hindu and recent Afghan and Sikh kingdoms. Colonialism is also differentiated into early, middle, and later periods, as postcolonialism had early and later phases. Other tiers and layers of the storyline are internal, private, and familial and follow what anthropologists might call 'rites of passage' of a business family: entrystruggle-achievement-climax-retirement/death-pilgrimage/commercial distress.

The writers also use zoom-in and zoom-out techniques to produce distant histories, contexts of families, and details of their families historically and genealogically. Despite narrative linearity, dynamic histories are produced through the crisscrossing of temporal and spatial scales and strands, matrices of matrimony, and strategies of nested stories of extended families through genealogical tables, 'hundred of cousins' and 'Bagai complex' (latter both as architectural and metaphoric space, inhabited by the family). Non-Bagai family names extend Bagais 'outside' through matrimony, besides other connections.

The plurality of storylines is more apparent in the family histories of Sethi and Bagai. These planes reveal how both families navigated through different political regimes, as merchants from Punjab –Bhera and Lyalpur, respectively, though Bagais had diversified early in non-commercial roles. Stories of colonial collaboration and contestation–both political and representational– are produced through these techniques and templates. Stories of fortunes and fates constitute an affective sphere of romance and nostalgia for their historical subjects against the contemporary demonization of Hindu *banya*. This nostalgic romance comes out of a distance, which produces myths, considers Appadurai (1988). Nostalgia, as the shared affective sphere, is produced not only through the biographies of humans but also through family business entities, artifacts, and architecture. Many voices were raised amongst Derawals and outside on the recent loss of Dera 'Bagai Palace' to real estate ("Plan to raze," 2021). Habibullah Paracha's story participates in this narrative structure, though in a more personal biographical way. Ailawadis's structure is mixed, including both storylines and ethnographic descriptions. *Parachagan* is more distant in this structure, being largely ethnographic and structured through larger temporal horizons from ancient to contemporary periods, zooming in on community representation.

The retrospective production of selected works is also revealed in the hyper-religious idiom and voice of these works, as they claim to realign private memories with national imperatives, such as the Islamization project of General Zia in Pakistan. However, Nazli stands apart from other works in this respect. One aspect of the secular, grounded, and objective nature of Nazli's characteristic work in comparison with other works is that of recognizing human frailty – anxieties, rivalries, intrigues, and injury to others. Her analysis is of a more sociological than ideological nature.

Ailawadi's work points out two central themes relevant to frontier historiography: the role of the Hindu business community in the development of what colonial Dera was becoming and how that region was marginalized in frontier politics, itself owing to colonial practice: – separation from Punjab and privileging of north frontier over south. This assertion is further reproduced and circulated through the later work by SM Bagai.

Contribution of the Business Family Histories in Frontier

While talking of Auerbach, Greenblatt (2005) refers to "the incomparable historical vantage point" (p. 46), which selected texts afford. Reading these texts in the preceding sections reveals their relevance and role in diverse areas of history, literature, and broader scholarship for a better and deeper understanding of the frontier and its history. Frontier historiography has remained broadly engrossed in three subjects: conflict/security, nationalism/ethnicity, and colonial transformation/accommodation of frontier in its social, economic, and political organization (Nichols, 2017). All these subjects have been put to the margins or even completely erasure groups, largely urban and commercial, pitting them against agricultural groups, rural political economy, and land-based relations.

Without denying their 'literary' element, these selected texts participate in the production of frontier historiography, which is more nuanced and granulated. Selected texts in this paper bring up the stories of these commercial communities being marginalized, silenced, and erased. Despite being authored by non-professionals as non-scholarly and non-canonical texts, these works still carry value and offer insights into the gaps of high politics of frontier, invoking spaces of micro-histories of everyday life, of social and cultural practices, and of groups denied memory of presence and role in the frontier. Dera diaspora literature particularly invokes not only perspectives of non-Muslim groups in the frontier but also addresses the regional binary of north vs. south frontier, with the north frontier imperially privileged and prioritized over the south.

Selected texts not only highlight the presence and role of these groups in the colonial frontier but also emerge to correct and even contest colonial constructions of commercial communities as lowly to martial races constituted primarily around the metonymy of peasant-warrior: the latter being Pushtun in the colonial frontier. The writers, texts, and communities in this study reiterate and reinvest in discursive fields their claims of ancient and superior origins, diverse and dominant trajectories of the communities, and social organization, which was distinct yet shared with frontier Pashtuns. Through the selected texts, these communities signify the growing historical function of 'commercial' against and along colonial 'martial' function.

The texts are implicated in coloniality and yet emerge to be contesting it and even contriving their place in it. The coloniality and contestations against it involve issues of genre, origins and identity, constructions of social hierarchies, and colonial function of groups as collaborators/anti-colonialists. However, the texts also suggest provisionality and contingency, changing trajectories of relations with colonialism, and above all, retrospective production of coloniality in these texts produced post-colonially. This also calls for the imperative of supplementing these histories with both archival and indigenous sources.

These texts also provide a basis for developing frontier business history, which has yet to be explored by historians and scholars. However, works on business histories for the colonial period regarding mainland India and Sind have emerged. The family histories enrich the related genres of literature on family and community otherwise ignored in the frontier. Even in literary studies, such texts provide an opportunity to explore more affective spaces emerging from tensions and anxieties of the communally and culturally differentiated colonial frontier, some arising out of groups made invisible and voiceless in social hierarchies, some lost and being recollected after partition and migration. A rich understanding of frontier production through such affective spaces is made possible through these texts lying at the interstices of factual and fictional, historical and imaginary. These works co-constitute partition and diaspora literature as well as oral history projects—a globally expanding subject (Shopes, 2015), thus creating a critical niche for frontier.

However, these works also further highlight some gaps. Though alluded to, these texts fail to bring to light the inter-relations of frontier commercial communities of different faiths, ethnicities, and origins. Relations of commercial communities with producers/agrarian groups and labor still need to be explored in these works. There is also a need to read these works along with supplementary sources; these include imperial and oral history archives, public histories, diaspora literature, and museums. While capitalizing on such sources, scholars must guard against the retrospective bias shaping these works. These texts idealize the historical possibility of putting more missing pieces towards a ‘complete picture’ of the historical experience of what frontier with its erased communities was, even though such completion and closure always remain an ideal worthy of pursuit.

Conclusion

Considering Greenblatt regarding what anecdotes and such fragments can reveal about much broader textual, textural, and historical scenes, fragments of family anecdotes in selected texts have the power to broadly represent frontier communities and histories (Greenblatt & Payne, 2005). This paper concludes that selected texts contribute to indigenous narratives, particularly from communities relegated to lowly margins in the colonial construction of the frontier. These colonial frontier communities were commercial groups and castes. Frontier historiography can benefit by including these otherwise marginalized voices and works. Reading selected works brings up these historical groups within broader frontier history, besides offering insights and resources for future research on business and family history, diaspora, colonial capitalism and collaboration, and the postcolonial transition of these groups. Researchers also need to address gaps left by this genre of narratives besides revisiting critical debates of frontier scholarship. These gaps include communal and ethnic relations of commercial communities, their social and political role, and their broader function within colonial capitalism. Community and family histories, including business history, indicate new directions for future research agendas for more grounded and granulated frontier historiography and scholarship.

Basic Text Selected for Analysis

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Contexts of the Book Production

This section highlights the contexts of the selected works, including writers' biographies, book histories, and regional contexts.

Writers' Biographies. Stephen Greenblatt iterates on the role of the present in the construction of the past. "… it is not possible to transcend one's own historical moment; all histories are themselves historically contingent on the present in which they are constructed" (Greenblatt & Payne, 2005, p. 3). Foucault (1984) also considers that "The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture'' (p.107). Selected history texts have been written by insiders, being members of the family, delivering the burden of presenting the family with its historical significance, and defending (and even creating) distinct places for their families. None of the writers is a professional historian and has not used imperial archives and local narratives of the frontier to supplement their work, a task left to scholars such as S.M. Hanifi (2011). This is despite the fact that writers such as Younus exhibited literary and historical sensibility in their works.

Instead of engaging in trade like his ancestors, Younus Sethi (1922-2000) served in Radio Broadcasting, Pakistan Information Ministry, and Pakistan Embassies at Kabul and Tehran. His work was published by his son, Saleem Sethi, a civil servant. Ashraf Faiz retired as lieutenant colonel from the Pakistan Army, and his work was inspired by his father's works, a newspaper publisher, and the colonial gazetteer tradition. Nazli Jamal (1956) graduated in literature from Iowa and Scotland and had a career in English teaching and educational development, besides engaging in family business. Her protagonist is her grandfather, who served as Karachi's mayor. This family had been close to President Ayub Khan, PM Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and his daughter, PM Benazir Bhutto. Reviewing her work, Sumbal (2023) noted that "… despite her obvious awe of her paternal grandfather, the author has not tried to paint him as an idol. Although the book is … a labor of love, Jamal has depicted him as a real-life character: a powerful, ambitious man with foibles and failures."

Surender Mohan Bagai (or SM Bagai) (1928-n.d.) was born and bred in Delhi. He didn't live in Dera, to which his parents had themselves belonged. His career in the Indian Revenue Service spanned from 1953 to 1989, and he served as State Vigilance Commissioner of Nagaland. His cousin, Atul Bagai from the Indian Administrative Service, wrote its Foreword. Nachiketa (2007)

reports that the book took shape in six years and with the help of Dolly Nanda (nee Bagai). Jaswant Ram Ailawadi (1890-1973) was a schoolteacher when he left Dera at the time of Partition. He also wrote other pedagogical works.

These works have been produced in postcolonial states. The colonial period and partition were personally witnessed by three writers—Sethi, Bagai, and Ailawaid, as the parents of the other two writers did. "Two levels of memorial recall operate here: the elders remembering what had happened, and the adult author remembering them remembering" (Kabir, 2004, p.173). Anaya Kabir (2004), while referring to Meera, Syal's novel "*Anita and Me*" further notes that "Within (Meera) Syal's narrative, however, post-memory belongs to neither the public nor the personal sphere, but to an alternative community space that is somewhere in between a reconstituted Punjabiness that exists behind closed suburban doors" (p.173).

Book Histories. Production and circulation of historical works provide for their canonical valuation and legitimacy, which come from biblio-scholarly circuits and controls, including writers, publishers, readers, reviewers, critics, librarians, and later researchers. Forms of self-publishing produced the texts under study, which were considered non-traditional, low in this hierarchy, and therefore generally excluded from scholarly circuits (Baverstock & Steinitz, 2013; Furst, 2019). Such works still offer space to the excluded. Literature on self-publishing addresses bibliographic controls, library practice, losses to the publishing industry, and reading cultures (Holley, 2015), but not on personal investments and informal circulation nodes of self-publication in South Asia.

Nazli Jamal, despite her resourcefulness, got her work published by Millenium Media, an advertising rather than publishing entity. Her publisher still enjoys a better place in outreach. Sethi's book was published by Gandhara-Hindko Academy Peshawar, a small local organization promoting Hindko literature. Though originally publisher-driven and printed in *The Frontier Post* serially, Ashraf's work was produced in book form by a small local concern, Hashmi Publications, Rawalpindi, as was the English version of Ailawadi's work by Shobha Ram Laul, New Delhi. *Dera Bagai* is, however, expressly self-published.

Reception of published works also indicates the grids and planes of their circulation and valuation. Both *Dera Bagai* and *Paracha Habibullah* were produced and received largely in elite environments through celebratory book launch events and media coverage. Another *derawal* book on colonial memories of the community, in and through cuisine, also garnered elite and

even global reception: it was by Pushpa, Atul Bagai's mother (Bagai, 2014; Beijing Book Fair, 2014). Jamals' work has been published twice: in 2015 and 2022. Its Foreword and Introduction also reveal the social capital of her family, as these were written by Jamsheed Marker, a prominent Pakistani envoy, and Kamal Azfar, a lawyer, development leader, and Governor of Sind province. All these selected texts have remained excluded from dominant discourses of epistemic communities despite some marginal and transitory visibility of two works by Nazli and Bagai.

Dera Bagai was self-published in 2007 as a 383-page book. Bagai family members made visits to Dera during the mid-1990s and 2000s, a process made possible through political narratives of 'people to people' contact and further facilitated by the UNEP assignment of the writer's cousin - Atul Bagai, who himself visited Dera in 2003 during UNDP Conference held in Islamabad (Dera Bagai, 2007; Nachiketa, 2013). Derawal's connection across borders has been productive in both writing and documentaries. Different imperatives drove this change, including growing mobility in a globalizing world, oral history projects involving the diaspora, the Seraiki movement, and a transitory shift of secular representations over religious/ideological ones in Pakistan as a consequence of the 'war on terror' enabling "people to people contact" across borders. This work thus comes as a result of such regional, global, ideological, and technological shifts. Atul Bagai, in and through UN's discursive technologies of regional cooperation, appears to be not only a critical node in the grids of (re)production but also circulation of Dera diaspora narratives, both genealogical and culinary, one by his cousin and other by his mother respectively. SM Bagai's narrative of the postcolonial reconstruction of his family is the refugee narrative of "Punjabi self-reliance and industry," with little role in official accounts of rehabilitation, as notes Ian Talbot (2011, p.110).

Hamara Dera Ismail Khan by Jaswant Ram Ailawadi was titled "Tasveer-e-Ashyana" when it was originally published in Urdu from India in 1952. Its English translation by Ram Narain Bhattia came with its 224-page first print in 2005 under the title of "Hamara Dera Ismail Khan- Tasveer-e-Ashyana" (hereby referred to as "*Hamara Dera*"). This paper is based on its English version.

"*Peshawar ka Sethi Khandan*" (*Sethi Family of Peshawar*) was written by Muhammad Younus Sethi in Urdu and left with his family as a manuscript. Gandhara-Hindko Academy Peshawar published it in 2020 as a 112-page book. The work is a product of 'collective authorship' as Saleem Sethi made

some additions to the manuscript regarding the original writer and later family members. Cultural contact during Younus' stay in Kabul and Tehran and his advocacy of the culture and history of newly created Pakistan was largely informed by shared cultural spheres of Muslim imperia, in which circulation of Sethi helped produce his historical and literary works. This shared cultural sphere served as original and foundational for the identity and ideology of Pakistan, in whose (re)production Sethi himself participated through his role in the Ministry of Information and Culture. As enumerated in his family history, his work was also inspired by welfare works in the frontier and Afghanistan by his trader-ancestors, particularly Karim Bakhsh Sethi. These works were invoked as material markers of his family instead of greed and profit.

Parachagan by Ashraf Faiz was originally published in English as a serial in the *Frontier Post* (Faiz, 2009) and translated into Urdu in 2009 by Tariq Faiz, a civil servant and Ashraf Faiz's brother. His work was initially published by Rehmat Shah Afridi, who was the owner of this left-leaning newspaper and himself a Pushtun entrepreneur. At the same time, his tribesmen were colonially considered local traders. His attachment to the anti-colonial frontier history and frontier trade communities influenced Ashraf Faiz to undertake the postcolonial construction of his trade community, as is acknowledged in the book's Introduction. Ashraf Faiz's father, Faiz Muhammad Paracha, has also authored some books, including one outlining regional branches of the Paracha community. Ashraf also participates in the colonial gazetteer tradition to which he was exposed through his military career and civil service connections of the family.

Regional Contexts and Communities. A sizable presence existed of what historians term 'Peshawari Muslim merchants' in the northwest frontier (Markovits, 2000). This merchant community had been circulating within cultural-commercial spheres of Muslim imperia (Muslim princely states of Afghanistan, Persia, Central Asia, and even British India) with greater ease than their commercial counterparts, non-Muslims. Its historical significance lies in its location on the intersection of vast Muslim imperial geographies. Peshawar was privileged as a major trade entrepot in the colonial frontier owing to the Khyber-Kabul connection, or what Hanifi (2011) terms the colonial "Kabul Hypothesis."

A sizeable Hindu population lived in Dera city, as in Bannu city, and also dominated Dera in terms of public life, trade, and modernity. Other Hindus in the frontier were a tiny minority, including those in Peshawar. Dera has long

been considered the cultural capital of the frontier. Dera in Bagai history emerges in and through Hindu representation and still functions as a model of collective and co-existing communal life.

Dera is known for Gomal Pass, which had long been used as a major trade route than Khyber during the pre-colonial period. Dera was the main trade entrepot for the Powinda trade, descending both from Baluchistan and Gomal itself and served as the first major trade center for both streams of trade to and from Kabul and Qandhar. In this paper, DI Khan has been taken as 'Dera' as is popular amongst the '*Derawals*' themselves, both Dera residents and their descendants, including the diaspora.

Nature of the Texts

Homi Bhabha (2003), in his "The World and the Home," invokes the responsibility of the critic 'to fully realize'… the un-spoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (p. 373). In this study, not only are texts seen to bring up such 'pasts' of business communities from the colonial frontier, but they also make legible and heard histories and voices of otherwise invisible, silenced, and erased groups. This section deals with the main themes taken up in the books and provides a textual analysis of the structure and style of the selected works.

Sethi Family of Peshawar. *Sethi Family of Peshawar* has been divided into seven chapters. The first three chapters deal with Peshawar history, origins, and early history of the Sethi family since its migration from Bhakkar in Punjab to finally settling down in Peshawar, and then prominent personalities before the rise of this family in the colonial period for its cross-border trade, particularly with Central Asia. The following three chapters deal with the rise of the Sethi family during the colonial period, with Karim Bakhsh Sethi as the main character of the Sethi family in this climax, and his two sons with their histories spanning the last decades of the colonial and some decades of the postcolonial period. The last chapter covers details of generations in the postcolonial period and the details regarding two related families, Fazal Ilahi Gurrwara and Khawaja Sultan.

Though the Sethi family belonged to the trade community, this family gained its climax under Karim Bakhsh Sethi (1860-1930) for his cross-border trade extending towards Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as inside British India. Karim Bakhsh developed close relations with the British, thus awarding him titles of Khan Bahadur and OBE (Order of the British Empire). However,

the family suffered serious commercial setbacks and crises during his lifetime, mainly owing to the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which had consequences in Central Asia in the 1920s. His sons, however, continued trade despite serious challenges. The writer notes that the Sethi family has moved to other occupations, such as army, civil service, medicine, and other employment. However, many in the family continued business and trade as their ancestral occupation. Yet, they lost colonial significance in trade and business in the region.

The writer of *Sethi Family* attempts to construct the family in relation to the challenging nature of frontier politics. The family, which has its old Punjabi origins, is non-Pushtun and Peshawar-based. On one side, it places the family in close proximity to the original moments of the new nation-state through the participation of, and support by, its family members in the political struggle for independence. On the other hand, it also identifies with the aspirations of the Pushtun population–by moral support of the anti-colonial political struggles of Red Shirts and tribal warriors, by philanthropic support of the needy tribal people suffering colonial oppression, and by promoting Pushtun literature through its Urdu translation.

Parachagan. *Parachagan* has been divided into six chapters and three appendices, besides pictures and maps. The first chapter engages with the origins of the word 'Paracha.' The second chapter brings to light multiple perspectives and debates on ethnic identification and the origins of the community. The following three chapters deal with the language, religion, race, occupation, and lifestyle of the Paracha community. The sixth chapter is the conclusion and summarizes the discussions in previous chapters, with the assertion of the writer's claims for a distinct social status and ethnic origins amongst other frontier and Punjabi Muslim business communities. Three appendices in the book deal with the colonial perspective on the community, a colonial report on Makhad, a commercial colony associated historically with Parachas, and the relation of the Paracha community with trade and economy.

The writer asserts the Afghani/Persian origins of the community, claiming its ancient Muslim identity against other Muslim business communities of frontier and Punjab who converted to Islam very recently in history. This particularly comes in opposition to other and dominant populations – Pashtuns - with distinct claims of race and ethnicity. However, there had been affinities with Pushtun culture, even if not its ethnicity, amongst Parachas of the northwest frontier, mainly through situating Makhad, a commercial colony on the Indus, within a Pushtun cultural context. Business practices, history, and

circulatory networks are discussed in the book but are very briefly scattered across the pages. There appears to be a struggle in the text to carve out a distinct identity for the Paracha community based on its ethnicity, ancientness, early conversion to Islam, non-Indian/non-Hindu-ness, abhorrence to usury-based finance for trade, and above all, contestation of colonial construction of Parachas as hawkers or rural shopkeepers.

The writer also creates a distinct identity of Parachas through its social organization, customs, and traditions related to marriage, family, residential infrastructure, and other identity markers and materialities. Architecture does appear as a distinct materiality of community identity, circulated through images in the book as well. Yet, there is not any specific architectural sample preserved for posterity exhibiting family identity, commercial power, and artistic tastes, as is the case with other Peshawari business family Sethis.

Paracha: HM Habibullah. Though structured around the person of Habibullah Paracha and organized as his biography by the writer, it unfolds the characters of the family and also gives, in the end, details about his progeny, termed by the writer as 'Habib's clan' instead of the general Paracha family, thus carving a distinct place out of the broader community of Parachas.

The biography of Habibullah Paracha has been divided into three main parts. The first part deals with Habibullah's earlier life, family, Paracha community, life at Makhad, childhood, education, and training. This part leads to his adventure to Peshawar and Bukhara via Afghanistan. It also explores his three marriages, commercial circulations, Russian expansion and changes in Central Asia owing to the Bolshevik Revolution, his displacement and then relocation to Persia, and aspirations for a political career starting with a local '*kursi-nasheen.'* Part two deals with his business adventure to the Far East, first in China and then in Japan, and his dislocations and struggles towards Amritsar and Kashmir during World War II. Part three engages with his trade journeys with Japan and Hong Kong, his entrepreneurship career in manufacturing, and others. This also covers his political career, mainly starting with his becoming Mayor of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, his intermediary efforts for Benazir Bhutto during the Zia regime, and other commercial and political ventures. In addition to these three parts, the book also includes some details regarding Habibullah, his community and family, and his ancestral site. Habibullah's story of commercial adventures takes the readers to the lands of Afghanistan, Central Asia, Russia, Iran, mainland India, China, Japan, and Pakistan after Independence.

Dera Bagai. "*The Lives and History of Dera Bagais***"** (or briefly *Dera Bagai*) has fourteen chapters and twelve appendices. One chapter is an article on Dera history by Ravi Nangia, which traces pre-Islamic Hindu origins of Frontier and Punjab generally and of Hindu South and Buddhist North divided by Kotal Pass between Kohat and Peshawar. With the interlude of Muslim rule, it returns to the rise of Hindu officers of administration and revenue (governors and kardars or *diwans*) under Nawab of Dera or Sikhs and their descendants in the British revenue department. The lineage of *diwans* included historically known names of Diwan Manak Rai Gorwara and then his contemporary Diwan Lakhi Mal, succeeded by his son Diwan Dualat Rai and grandson Diwan Jaggan Nath. History of *Dera Bagai* explores origins: ancestors, original hometowns, castes, and etymological traces of family from India to Russia. After introducing early ancestors, *Dera Bagai* sketches near ancestors in the Sikh period extending to the early colonial period. SM Bagai then develops genealogical tables and maps and embarks on the journey of describing and constructing life histories of families on both male and female sides. As a story of modernity, it introduces the Dera Hindu community and its role in the new Dera city, education, municipality, river embankment, bazar improvements, etc.

Dera Bagai is also a story of the production of a community and locality in and through such modernity, woven through the textures of an extended family growingly engaged in diverse occupations. The book also gives insights into the religious and social life of Hindu men and women while briefly referring to the only Muslim ward composed of artisans (particularly noisy utensil makers) and cart men. This history of the Bagai family opens up a spectacle of its relations with other Hindu families related through matrimony or otherwise and spread across the frontier, Punjab, and mainland India. It also highlights circulatory grids of religious life through the pilgrimage economy involving family visits to Hardwar and Ganga. This work offers an elite perspective, like Nazli, marginalizing the presence of both Muslims and other Hindus in Dera.

Hamara Dera. Though Hamara Dera is largely about the region of Dera as a home to the Hindu business community, it provides details of the business community as well as Hindu business families engaged in trade, business, and finance in and around Dera. The book covers the history of Dera from ancient Hindu times to precolonial Durrani and Sikh rules and then the British. It presents a profile of Jaggan Nath, who has long served Dera on the municipal committee and board. The author then brings to discussion the political history of the frontier through communal and congress politics with Bacha Khan and

the role of the British (as Roos-Kepple and Olaf Caroe) in communally patronizing Pashtuns. It discusses administrative issues of separating the frontier from Punjab and the merger of Dera with it after separating it from Punjab's areas of Leia and Bhakkar.

Then, the book allocates a significant portion to religious and cultural life – mainly Hindu but also shared spaces and practices–through details of prominent personalities, architecture, and practices, including fairs and festivals. A chapter on education–modern, Hindu religious, for both girls and boys, besides one for specially-abled students, has been included, presenting colonial Dera as advanced in education, mainly by efforts of the local trade community. However, government-sponsored Mission School had been there since the 1860s. It also gives gazetteer-style ethnographic details of population, climate, productions, trade, and markets.

Close Reading

Using techniques and strategies of close Reading supplemented with a new historicist approach, this section deals with narrative structure, template, style, and related aspects of critical textual analysis of the selected texts. In these texts, one can see a 'collapse of distinction' in Jameson's terms (Jameson, 1991) of history, memory, orality, (auto)biography, family records, and artifacts (latter as photos, maps, illustrations, and drawings). These writings primarily originate in orality and memory: writers used methods of interviews – both recorded or memorized. However, none of the writers are professionals in oral history; rather, they developed based on available repertoires and resources of family memory. Written sources have been used mostly to supplement the works, as in Sethi and Nazli. Still, Ashraf Faiz and Bagai have used these written and secondary sources as their main methodology in search of their 'origins' and in Ashraf Faiz for constructing his ethnographic production of family customs, habitat, and cultural practices. But orality and memory constituted an overwhelming method and source of the construction of these works.

The selected texts are what Meghna Guhathakurta (1998) calls "The 'insider's account' of memories" (p. 128). The central motif of these narratives is the "colonial glory" of these elite business families - Sethi, Bagai, and Nazli Jamal particularly signify this, though Ashraf, too, participates in it. Sethi and Bagai's families mainly lost their business glory during the colonial period, even though many of their families continued to operate in the business world. While reviewing oral history collections, Victor Geraci (2005) highlights

"recurring thematic motifs centered on the longing for the good old days on the farm, the merits of the hard life, a sense of community, the strength of family, the bonds of ethnic heritage, and the importance of education for upward mobility. …. common ground in their endeavors to clarify the lives of lesser-known participants" (p. 62) in history. He further notes that "practiced memories (archival memory), … are filtered through past personal memories that are not "pure recall" (Geraci, 2005, p. 64).

Nostalgia, political and personal, is produced through the affective textures of the works. Bagai's work is about the signification of nostalgia for the 'colonial glory' of family and the loss of its ancestral homeland and fortunes. Ailawadi's work, though, invokes the 'pre-eminence' of the Hindu community in colonial Dera; this 'pre-eminence' is also driven by nostalgia. Such discursive and psychic investment in reclaiming the 'golden past' of the family is to resurrect emotional resources for a better place in refugee rehabilitation, at least socially, when the appellation of 'sharnarthi' (refugee) had become derogatory (Gulati, 2013). Ailawadi's signification of elaborate religious spaces, architecture, and practices to gain social status as true servants of Hinduism, as those who celebrated it in Hindu dominant locality of otherwise Muslim majority Punjab and Frontier. Thus, nostalgia – private and familial - had a decisive function in postcolonial constructions of the community. The writers produce nostalgia through the construction of, and an appeal to, humanizing the fate of families, which otherwise are socially produced through distance, distrust, and even hatred in the public imagination. Dera Hindu texts particularly deploy this strategy of hiding popular imaginaries against commercial communities by constructing anti-Hindu riots as 'communal' rather than anti-*banya*. It is yet to be seen how these familial discursive investments produce a different South Asia as an affective sphere than power spheres envisaged and endeavored by nation-states.

Family histories in this study follow dual tiers and layers of storylines. One is external, public, and regional, as it covers pre- to post-colonial periods, though each has its own differentiations: precolonial into ancient Hindu and recent Afghan and Sikh kingdoms. Colonialism is also differentiated into early, middle, and later periods, as postcolonialism had early and later phases. Other tiers and layers of the storyline are internal, private, and familial and follow what anthropologists might call 'rites of passage' of a business family: entry-struggle-achievement-climax-retirement/death-pilgrimage/commercial distress.

The writers also use zoom-in and zoom-out techniques to produce distant histories, contexts of families, and details of their families historically and genealogically. Despite narrative linearity, dynamic histories are produced through the crisscrossing of temporal and spatial scales and strands, matrices of matrimony, and strategies of nested stories of extended families through genealogical tables, 'hundred of cousins' and 'Bagai complex' (latter both as architectural and metaphoric space, inhabited by the family). Non-Bagai family names extend Bagais 'outside' through matrimony, besides other connections.

The plurality of storylines is more apparent in the family histories of Sethi and Bagai. These planes reveal how both families navigated through different political regimes, as merchants from Punjab–Bhera and Lyalpur, respectively, though Bagais had diversified early in non-commercial roles. Stories of colonial collaboration and contestation – both political and representational– are produced through these techniques and templates. Stories of fortunes and fates constitute an affective sphere of romance and nostalgia for their historical subjects against the contemporary demonization of Hindu *banya*. This nostalgic romance comes out of a distance, which produces myths, considers Appadurai (1988). Nostalgia, as the shared affective sphere, is produced not only through the biographies of humans but also through family business entities, artifacts, and architecture. Many voices were raised amongst Derawals and outside on the recent loss of Dera 'Bagai Palace' to real estate ("Plan to raze," 2021). Habibullah Paracha's story participates in this narrative structure, though in a more personal biographical way. Ailawadis's structure is mixed, including both storylines and ethnographic descriptions. *Parachagan* is more distant in this structure, being largely ethnographic and structured through larger temporal horizons from ancient to contemporary periods, zooming in on community representation.

Retrospective production of selected works is also revealed in the hyper-religious idiom and voice of these works, as they claim to realign private memories with national imperatives, such as the Islamization project of General Zia in Pakistan. However, Nazli stands apart from other works in this respect. One aspect of the secular, grounded, and objective nature of Nazli's characteristic work in comparison with other works is that of recognizing human frailty – anxieties, rivalries, intrigues, and injury to others. Her analysis is of a more sociological than ideological nature.

Ailawadi's work points out two central themes relevant to frontier historiography: the role of the Hindu business community in the development

of what colonial Dera was becoming and how that region was marginalized in frontier politics, itself owing to colonial practice: – separation from Punjab and privileging of north frontier over south. This assertion is further reproduced and circulated through the later work by SM Bagai.

Contribution of the Business Family Histories in Frontier

While talking of Auerbach, Greenblatt (2005) refers to "the incomparable historical vantage point" (p. 46), which selected texts afford. Reading these texts in the preceding sections reveals their relevance and role in diverse areas of history, literature, and broader scholarship for a better and deeper understanding of the frontier and its history. Frontier historiography has remained broadly engrossed in three subjects: conflict/security, nationalism/ethnicity, and colonial transformation/accommodation of frontier in its social, economic, and political organization (Nichols, 2017). All these subjects have been put to the margins or even completely erasure groups, largely urban and commercial, pitting them against agricultural groups, rural political economy, and land-based relations.

Without denying their 'literary' element, these selected texts participate in the production of frontier historiography, which is more nuanced and granulated. Selected texts in this paper bring up the stories of these commercial communities being marginalized, silenced, and erased. Despite being authored by non-professionals as non-scholarly and non-canonical texts, these works still carry value and offer insights into the gaps of high politics of frontier, invoking spaces of micro-histories of everyday life, of social and cultural practices, and of groups denied memory of presence and role in the frontier. Dera diaspora literature particularly invokes not only perspectives of non-Muslim groups in the frontier but also addresses the regional binary of north vs. south frontier, with the north frontier imperially privileged and prioritized over the south.

Selected texts not only highlight the presence and role of these groups in the colonial frontier but also emerge to correct and even contest colonial constructions of commercial communities as lowly to martial races constituted primarily around the metonymy of peasant-warrior: the latter being Pushtun in the colonial frontier. The writers, texts, and communities in this study reiterate and reinvest in discursive fields their claims of ancient and superior origins, diverse and dominant trajectories of the communities, and social organization, which was distinct yet shared with frontier Pashtuns. Through

the selected texts, these communities signify the growing historical function of 'commercial' against and along colonial 'martial' function.

The texts are implicated in coloniality and yet emerge to be contesting it and even contriving their place in it. The coloniality and contestations against it involve issues of genre, origins and identity, constructions of social hierarchies, and colonial function of groups as collaborators/anti-colonialists. However, the texts also suggest provisionality and contingency, changing trajectories of relations with colonialism, and above all, retrospective production of coloniality in these texts produced post-colonially. This also calls for the imperative of supplementing these histories with both archival and indigenous sources.

These texts also provide a basis for developing frontier business history, which has yet to be explored by historians and scholars. However, works on business histories for the colonial period regarding mainland India and Sind have emerged. The family histories enrich the related genres of literature on family and community otherwise ignored in the frontier. Even in literary studies, such texts provide an opportunity to explore more affective spaces emerging from tensions and anxieties of the communally and culturally differentiated colonial frontier, some arising out of groups made invisible and voiceless in social hierarchies, some lost and being recollected after partition and migration. A rich understanding of frontier production through such affective spaces is made possible through these texts lying at the interstices of factual and fictional, historical and imaginary. These works co-constitute partition and diaspora literature as well as oral history projects—a globally expanding subject (Shopes, 2015), thus creating a critical niche for frontier.

However, these works also further highlight some gaps. Though alluded to, these texts fail to bring to light the inter-relations of frontier commercial communities of different faiths, ethnicities, and origins. Relations of commercial communities with producers/agrarian groups and labor still need to be explored in these works. There is also a need to read these works along with supplementary sources; these include imperial and oral history archives, public histories, diaspora literature, and museums. While capitalizing on such sources, scholars must guard against the retrospective bias shaping these works. These texts idealize the historical possibility of putting more missing pieces towards a 'complete picture' of the historical experience of what frontier with its erased communities was, even though such completion and closure always remain an ideal worthy of pursuit.

Conclusion

Considering Greenblatt regarding what anecdotes and such fragments can reveal about much broader textual, textural, and historical scenes, fragments of family anecdotes in selected texts have the power to broadly represent frontier communities and histories (Greenblatt & Payne, 2005). This paper concludes that selected texts contribute to Indigenous narratives, particularly from communities relegated to lowly margins in the colonial construction of the frontier. These colonial frontier communities were commercial groups and castes. Frontier historiography can benefit by including these otherwise marginalized voices and works. Reading selected works brings up these historical groups within broader frontier history, besides offering insights and resources for future research on business and family history, diaspora, colonial capitalism and collaboration, and the postcolonial transition of these groups. Researchers also need to address gaps left by this genre of narratives besides revisiting critical debates of frontier scholarship. These gaps include communal and ethnic relations of commercial communities, their social and political role, and their broader function within colonial capitalism. Community and family histories, including business history, indicate new directions for future research agendas for more grounded and granulated frontier historiography and scholarship.

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