Introduction

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This is not a book about Hamza Alavi (1921–2003), the Pakistani Marxist sociologist/anthropologist, but about social science in Pakistan, with a particular focus on its political economy, broadly interpreted. Specifically, this book is trying to understand why, how and with what consequences did one particular theoretical perspective come to exercise such a dominating influence on the analysis of state and society in post-independence Pakistan. There was much brilliant and insightful work done in the 1970s and 1980s on agrarian transition (S. Ahmad 1977; Khan 1975; Khan 1981; Hussain 1980), on industrial concentration (Amjad 1983), ethnicity (Ahmed 1998), and democratisation (A. Ahmad 1985, 2000). Yet it was Alavi's overdeveloped state thesis that dominated discussions and continued to determine how the Pakistani state was envisaged.

One possible explanation why Hamza Alavi's thesis has persisted and dominated, especially in the context of Pakistani scholarship, is the sheer breadth of Alavi's intellectual and practical engagement. Many of the studies and academics mentioned above are essential references confined to relatively narrower terms of engagement and disciplines, but wherever one approaches Pakistan through the broad political economy perspective, one finds that Alavi's pioneering work to be of noted relevance.

Before casting the spotlight on this one intervention, a quick digression on the extraordinary range of Alavi's career and scholarship would be worth our while. After all, he 'was one of the most important intellectuals from the Asian subcontinent to participate in (and in many cases formulate the terms of) debates from the 1960s onwards about Third World development' (TB 2004:341). This digression may help us understand some aspects of his overdeveloped state thesis.

Alavi started his career in the Bank of India as a Research Officer in 1945 and by 1952 he was one of its five principal officers. Unlike most (if not

quite all) Marxist intellectuals, Alavi left a comfortable career and moved to Tanzania to take up farming. He later enrolled for a PhD at the London School of Economics and then pursued a more conventional academic career at the Universities of Sussex, Leeds and Manchester. He was editor of *Pakistan Today* and was on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* and the *Journal of Peasant Studies*. Alavi was involved with various activist groups, such as the Pakistan Youth League, the Pakistan Socialist Society and the Committee for the Restoration of Democracy (formed after the 1958 coup), but not in formal electoral-based party politics.

Alavi's extended oeuvre over five decades included seminal pieces on US imperialism, aid to Pakistan, peasants, agrarian transition, kinship, women, ethnicity, the colonial mode of production, the sociology of developing societies, Islam and even on the Khilafat Movement. He was renowned for his original and controversial insights which went against the conceived wisdoms of, for example, Marxism and nationalism. He was a philosopher of Marxism but argued it was the middle peasantry (not the impoverished rural class) which was the most likely militant rural class and hence, a natural ally of the urban proletariat. Alavi's scholarship was very much in tune with and influenced the radical thinking of the 1960s and 1970s, in particular, his focus on imperialism and the colonial legacy. He argued that indigenous propertied classes were accomodated to imperialism and that capitalist development occurred on the basis of landowners utilising pre-capitalist production relations. This implied that the dominant structure was imperialism and global relations, and that domestic economic change was not contingent on eliminating feudal structures (TB 2004:342). Alavi departed from conventional nationalist Pakistani narratives, and downplayed the importance of religion behind the partition of British India; he argued instead that Muslim civil servants had led the movement to protect their jobs after independence – hence his arguments around the 'salariat' (Alavi 2002).

This diverse body of writing spanning a long academic career continued to find relevance for Pakistani scholars and a global academic audience. What is surprising though is that given (or perhaps because of) these very diverse scholarly interests, Alavi failed to formulate his 'grand theory of everything' related to the state and classes in Pakistan. He was unable (or unwilling), despite his understanding of Marxist and structuralist theories, to tie in his varied analysis into a single strand. While one could argue that Alavi may have been something of a 'polymath', what does seem surprising is that having written on so many varied themes, he never went back to try and build a more

encapsulating theory of the Pakistani state and society to unite his wide oeuvre. Very few of his scholarly interventions engage with his other pieces; they often stand alone, making important points in different, unrelated disciplines. This absence of a broader formulation linking through his numerous essays on diverse themes is most evident in his essays on the Pakistani state.

Despite his own intellectual eclecticism, it is for one particular idea that Alavi is best remembered and regarded as widely influential. It would be no exaggeration to argue that much of the conceptualisation and theorisation around Pakistan's political economy, broadly defined, over the past forty years, has been around Pakistan's state, its military, and consequently, about imperialism. Our focus in this book is Alavi's 1972 paper published in the *New Left Review*, 'The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh'. Alavi's (1972) thesis on the overdeveloped state has been revised and revisited in many forms by Alavi himself (see Alavi 1983, 1990, for example). The 1972 paper set the stage and provided the context for much subsequent analysis on political economy concerns in Pakistan. One obituary noted, 'rarely would one find a scholarly paper or a reading list in a relevant Sociology course at the best universities in the world where his article is not cited' (Sayeed 2004). Suhail (this volume) notes that the paper has been cited more than 1,100 times by scholars since publication.

For some scholars this enduring influence is proof of pioneering academic excellence. In 1972 the paper represented 'path-breaking work on the nature of the state in post-colonial societies' and was 'widely recognised as a major advance over the earlier theorisation about the nature of the state in Asia, Africa and Latin America by modernisation/political development and underdevelopment/dependency/world systems theorists' (Kumar 2004:3654). Alavi (1972) was a timely academic response to a crisis in theory and real politics. It was written in the context of the 1970s when a profound crisis in state theory prevailed during the advent of the debate framed around neo-neoliberalism and late capitalism. In the specific context of Pakistan, the creation of Bangladesh had 'shattered the idea of Islam as the ideological mask on which impossible territorial unity of Pakistan predicated its subjection to political dominance of the political classes' and Bhutto had risen to power and was still, in 1972, widely perceieved to be a radical change to 'patrician and praetorian classes' as Suhail argues in this volume.

Despite his emphasis on the colonial and on imperialism, Alavi (1972) was not just a product of the dependency school which was so influential in the 1970s. Instead, he had provided a renewed opportunity to examine the

relationship between class and state in developing countries and the 'subsequent emergence of state centric political theory was epitomised in the writings of Alavi' (Kumar 2004:3654). Alavi challenged the traditional Marxist view by arguing in his overdeveloped state scheme that the superstructure could become dominant and the bureaucratic-military state could become autonomous of domestic and international class forces. According to Kumar (2004:3654), this reformulation of the state had a profound influence on the ideas and opinions of the then influential neo-Marxism of John Saul, Colin Leys, Mahmood Mamdani, Issa Shivji, Claude Millassoux and Michael Stepan regarding their views of the postcolonial state in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Mali and Peru. And into the 1970s and 1980s, its influence manifested itself in the works of Pranab Bardhan, Gail Omvedt, Ashok Rudra, Supdipta Kaviraj, Achin Vanaik, among others, on theorising about the postcolonial state in India. Certainly Alavi does seem to have inspired the long-standing academic parlour game among scholars of Pakistan of trying to characterise the Pakistani state. Along with the overdeveloped state, in recent years we have also heard of the Garrison State, the Failed State, the World's Most Frightening State, the Drowning State and the Warrior State, among others.

This book starts with a less sanguine argument. The fact that a critic and interlocutor of Alavi's thesis writes that 'Alavi's conceptualisation appears to be remarkably resilient almost 40 years since it was formulated, and, at the very least, no other theory of the Pakistani state has emerged to compete meaningfully with the "overdeveloped" formulation' (Akhtar 2008:7), says more about the (dismal) state of social science and social scientists in Pakistan than about Alavi's original thesis (Zaidi 2002). Despite this starting point, the thinking of our contributors ranged freely and can be divided (by very rough characterisations) into those that focus on the enduring value of the 1972 paper and argue that it is still relevant (Shah, Javid and Armytage) and those who argue that it needs to be replaced by new thinking (Jan, Suhail, Javed, Akhtar and Khan).

THEORISING THE ALAVIAN PAKISTANI STATE[1]

Here we very briefly summarise Hamza Alavi's key arguments about the nature of the state in Pakistan in 1972 through the most recent and thorough interpreter of Alavi's overdeveloped state thesis. Akhtar (2008) critiques Alavi's

[1] Much of this and the next Section draw from Akhtar (2008) and Zaidi (2014a).

formulation and builds on it, highlighting significant weaknesses and adapts it to the present socio-economic and political formation of Pakistan. Akhtar is particularly important because he builds on Alavi and gives us a unique critical continuity from 1972 to 2008, and to 2014, finally concluding with this book in 2019. Without Akhtar (2008), there would not have been a Zaidi (2014a) (this paper is discussed later in this introduction).

Hamza Alavi's 1972 argument was based on the notion that a nexus of power existed in Pakistan between the landlords, the military, the bureaucracy and what he called 'metropolitan capital' which, based on Pakistan's colonial legacy and evolution, resulted in an 'overdeveloped' postcolonial state dominating an un- or under-developed society. It was the military-bureaucratic 'oligarchy' with the three propertied classes which kept what can be called Pakistan's political settlement in place. One of Akhtar's (2008) many critiques is to dismiss Alavi's 'static conception of structure that underlies his understanding of the overdeveloped state'. More than three decades later, using a Gramscian framework, Akhtar (2018) also brings in the political and cultural spheres of analysis which were missing in much of the neo-Marxist analysis of the 1970s.

Inspired by Alavi's emphasis on class and building on (improving) his relatively weak empirical base, this volume is predictably quite concerned with the measurement of and exposition of class. Jan does utilise the standard definition of 'large farmer', as does Alavi, of 100+ acres, and acknowledges the difficulties of incorporating the distinction between land ownership and self-cultivation. Jan acknowledges that the share of area farmed by large landlords has declined, but his chapter goes beyond Alavi and argues that large farmers in Pakistan have reproduced their class power beyond the village by investing in trade, urban property and industry, and in children's education in order to help them take up professional occupations. This was one example of several in which Jan shows how class in contemporary Pakistan has become more complicated. Class, he argues, varies by area and over time, and is not an abstract category to be read off from a given mode of production. In Punjab and Sindh, families control important Sufi shrines where substantial landlords combine material power with religious authority. Social origins, especially the caste background of rural elites, are important, so class is not simply a material concept.

Javed writes about the rise of bazaar traders and the trend of their increasing participation in provincial and national politics, as evidenced by the share of seats they hold in the national assembly. These traders are able to influence policy through a variety of lobbying strategies such as rent-seeking ties

with local state functionaries to evade taxes. Despite being an insulated and authoritarian regime, the efforts of the General Pervez Musharraf government (1999–2008) to assess the actual turnover of the retail sector through a documentation drive failed in the face of bazaar strikes including one that lasted eleven days in Punjab. In this volume, Armytage engages with Durr-e-Nayab's (2011) detailed taxonomy of class. In this schematic, 65 to 80 per cent of Pakistanis earn a living through manual labour, while the middle class (18 to 34 per cent of the population) are those with at least one family member with a tertiary education and one family member employed in non-manual work in sales, clerical, or professional positions. The upper middle class (6 per cent) are those with college education from one of the country's top schools, have probably been educated abroad, and are most likely to be employed as professionals, legislators, senior officials, managers, or in military roles. The upper elite (1 per cent) are in similar employment categories but in much more prominent roles and tend to derive income from profits on real estate and share ownership. Whether more neatly categorised such as by Armytage or loosely defined as by Jan, the definition and measurement of class is interrogated with rigour in many chapters of this book.

The rather vague assertions about measuring and evaluating state capacity in Alavi are fully reassessed and updated in this volume. This effort forms one of our key contributions to the discussion on the political economy of the state in Pakistan. The original inspiration for this book, Zaidi (2014a), wrote of a contemporary state in Pakistan that is unable to exercise its monopoly of violence uniformly across territories, while newly emerging groups such as the Taliban and urban mafias can both commit violence and challenge the brute force of the state. The state is unable to collect much tax revenue and many of its core functions in security and social services have been de facto privatised. But Shah (this volume) argues that the state's despotic power is still strong with its well-equipped military, para-military, intelligence and police, as demonstrated by its ability to wage external and internal wars. After 2014, for example, the state intervened successfully to displace the Pakistani Taliban from North Waziristan. In terms of state provision he notes that the story is not all about state failure, there are islands of state effectiveness such as the motorway police, construction of schools and employment of teachers. Shah notes that bureaucrats in the state have shown that they do have independent policy-making capabilities and that their agenda-setting power comes from different sources such as asymmetries in information, resources and expertise which together allow bureaucrats to shape the incentives of other social and

political groups. Javid and Suhail both argue that state power is contested at the local level by an array of historically constituted actors. But private patronage of this sort is ultimately dependent on connections to the state – it is access to public office or to those individuals who hold it that determines the capacity of traditional politicians and local level elites to provide patronage on a relatively large scale and to engage in rent seeking. Javid argues that the local state plays a crucial role in the delivery of patronage. The decentralisation on account of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan in 2010 resulted in the devolution of more powers of patronage to lower levels of government departments such as health and education and provided provincial governments with greater mechanisms through which to exert control over the civil administration. Akhtar argues that the bureaucracy has changed and become more embedded in local networks so is more likely to use its position of authority to benefit linked patronage networks. The increasingly diverse composition of the bureaucracy, he also argues, does not really mean that the Westernised elite has been replaced by another social group but that the entire civilian side of the bureaucracy has fragmented. Khan (this volume) focuses on an argument missing in Alavi – in his overdeveloped state, a power asymmetry exists between state institutions and social classes but this cannot explain why this power asymmetry between state and social classes varies significantly from one place to another within Pakistan.

As Akhtar reminds us, not only was an analysis and evaluation of society completely missing in most of Alavi's work, but it also lacked any analysis or evaluation of resistance, in particular, and the working classes, in general. As Akhtar argues:

> [W]hile Alavi's model of this state has offered much insight into the legacy of colonialism and the state forms it left behind, arguably the most gaping hole in his theoretical treatise is the lack of attention paid to the politics of the subordinate classes, or in other words, the working people upon whose exploitation the entire system of power rests. (Akhtar 2008:193)

There seems to be a complete absence of the dynamics of change and transition in Alavi's work, and one wonders how a theory of superstructure could have been so easily formulated ignoring social and class dynamics.

Although Akhtar (2008) makes the claim that 'Alavi's conceptualisation appears to be remarkably resilient' almost half a century later, Zaidi (2014a) rejects all claims to any relevance or resilience today. However, both Akhtar (2008) and Zaidi (2014a) recognise that much has changed in Pakistan, 'not

only with regard to how theorisation takes place, but also in terms of social structures and classes in Pakistan' (Zaidi 2014a:48). Akhtar brings in both notions of the 'intermediate class' – loosely called the middle class by others – and also religio-political movements and as players in the political arena in Pakistan. One of Akhtar's best known contributions has been that of the politics of 'common sense' or the ways in which people accept how power is actually articulated in Pakistan, hindering the possibility of popular politics and resistance and leading to 'the existing configuration of power' being 'reproduced as a function of both dominance and consent' (Akhtar 2008:32). Akhtar adds much value to an analysis 'from below' (Akhtar 2017, 2018).

This volume provides a major intervention in the debates around the nature of the political economy of Pakistan, focusing on the social dynamics of contemporary Pakistan, a theme which forms the core of all the contributions. Jan writes about the declining power of the old aristocracy and rising prominence of the rural middle class. Shah writes about the importance of social processes such as urbanisation, the middle class and the informal sector. Javed deals with capitalism and urbanisation, the decline of the old landed class and the rise of bazaar traders linked to rise of informal economy. Javid explores the rise of brokers who connect the state, politicians and those seeking patronage. Akhtar talks of an intermediate stratum which has historically emerged through the development of secondary and tertiary sectors of the agrarian economy which is now the face of capitalist modernity in Pakistan and also of the rise of the service sector and urbanisation. He looks beyond Pakistan to note that imperialism has changed in ways not accounted for by Alavi, which includes new internet and communications technology, financialisation and the rise of China and its role in infrastructure investment in Pakistan. He asks whether the rise of China represents a countervailing tendency to the historic influence of Western imperialism or will this just strengthen the traditional coercive arm of the state without enhancing the policy autonomy of the state.

Afiya S. Zia notes the importance of changes in the economy, mobility and social attitudes which follow a rapid increase in women's participation in the workforce, in the pursuit of education and in paid activism and the development sector, with religion playing a critical role as well. Khan discusses how changes in socio-economic processes led to new patterns of spatiality in villages and towns. Districts in central and northern Punjab, he notes, have relatively better provisioning of public goods such as roads, electricity and schools. McCartney records the dramatic shift in agricultural policy that provided farmers little direct support in the 1950s and massive support through

subsidies, support prices, rural infrastructure especially irrigation, and loans from state banks in the 1960s. The rising middle classes feature prominently in this volume, where Jan writes that governments from Ayub Khan onwards tried to break the power of the landed aristocracy by patronising the rural middle classes. More recently, this has complicated the definition of class as the investment in children's education by large landlords has allowed them to become professionals such as doctors, lawyers and engineers. Javid argues that the reforms of the civil service under Bhutto opened up the civil service to the middle class, while Akhtar writes that current estimates of the middle class have reached 60 million, though the aspiration to be middle class is even more important and the social goal has become a 'major cog in the hegemonic order'.

It is clear that many have criticised Alavi's view of the state, arguing that his influence has led scholars into a static treatment of the state and its relations with society and that they have been constrained by the overdeveloped presence of Alavi, limiting original thinking (Zaidi 2014a). This is not just about the weakness or inertia of Pakistani academia but is in part intrinsic to Alavi's original model. The overdeveloped state, argues Saul (1974), has its three core functions – to create territorial unity, promote economic development and subordinate social classes. This type of functionalism, according to Sang-Mpam (1986:611), 'explains the static and rigid notion of the inherited state; which is found in most writings on the postcolonial state' which is 'reified and tailored once and for all'. Many of the contributors to this volume move beyond this view and argue that the state in Pakistan never did do what Alavi claimed an overdeveloped state would and should be doing. Suhail (this volume) notes that Alavi frames his analysis in terms of a materialist interpretation of the state whereby the bureaucratic-military state appropriates the lion's share of the surplus from all sectors of production, while holding the productive forces in underdeveloped stasis relative to metropolitan capital. McCartney (this volume) finds that the empirical evidence for Pakistan shows that the state has instead failed to mobilise tax revenue and save and, except for agriculture in the 1960s, it has generally been unable to consistently implement policies, plans and long-term goals. This book engages with how the state has changed over time. Zia (this volume) argues that the state and societal institutions are increasingly loaded with an Islamic bias and justice is dispensed within this framework. Even judges have been compromised by Islamists, and militant groups have taken over the practice of justice. Khan introduces the logic of state spatiality and argues that the postcolonial state of Pakistan can be best characterised by uneven development of state space.

Akhtar (2008) had argued that 'the structure of power' has changed and is continuously evolving. The dialectic and the articulation between state, society, social classes, resistance and the like was missing in Alavi's analysis. Another important correction by Akhtar (2008) is the critique of Alavi's notion that from among the three 'propertied classes' he considered the metropolitan bourgeoisie to be the most powerful. Following David Harvey (2003), Akhtar made the distinction between the capitalist logic of imperialism and its territorial logic, arguing that the nature of relationships between imperialism and Pakistan need not be of the capitalist extractive kind, but one which fits in to a broader world view of the territorial logic of imperialism, a fact which seems well articulated after 1979. Akhtar is correct in stating that 'Alavi tends to analytically conflate the role of metropolitan *capital*, with the political impulse of metropolitan *states*, implying that the operational dynamics of these two qualitatively different manifestations of metropolitan power in the Pakistani social formation are indistinguishable' (Akhtar 2008:115).[2]

While there is much to build on in Akhtar's (2008) departure from Alavi, there is also some difference in emphasis and understanding. We (in this introduction) do not agree with Akhtar when he states, 'Alavi's basic contention that the postcolonial state is little more than a coercive apparatus and that this apparatus is directly inherited from the colonial state is compelling because the 'military-bureaucratic oligarchy' that was essentially a British creation *is still the country's dominant political force*' (Akhtar 2008: 8, emphasis added) and even when he further states, 'Few scholars of Pakistan would disagree that the coercive role of the state and its ability to maintain a consensus with the dominant classes would appear to be the two defining features of Pakistan's political economy well into the 21st century' (Akhtar 2008:8). We argue that it is perhaps not possible to see the state as such, given its fracturisation and inability to function even at a 'normal' level (Zaidi 2014a). However, Zaidi (2014a) and Akhtar (2008) are in agreement about the rise of new social classes, of the informal sector, of the increasing dominance of the urban economy with its manifestations, and about the fracturisation of power and hegemony of the state. Some critical differences in emphasis do, however, exist (see Zaidi 2014a for further discussion).

Numerous other contentions and departures in this collection from Alavi's interpretation of Pakistan's social formation and of its supposedly

[2] Akhtar adds in a footnote that '[i]n his empirical analysis however, Alavi's focus is on the manner in which the geo-strategic interests of imperialist *states*, and particularly the US, have been a major cause of the militarisation of the Pakistani state'.