

History, Ideology and Curriculum

The many political crises that Pakistan has experienced since it came into existence have had an impact on history writing in the nation. Imperatives of political centralisation are reflected in mainstream history writing's attempts to homogenise culture, traditions, the religious and social life of its people.

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To control the past is to master the present, to legitimise dominion and justify legal claims. It is the dominant powers - states, churches, political parties, private interests - which own or finance the media or means of production, whether it be school books or strip cartoons, films, or television programmes.¹

In the past, rulers and aristocrats used history to glorify their achievements as saviours and benefactors. In the modern period, political leaders use it to assert their authority and domination and legitimise their status as rulers. In the newly independent countries, particularly, leaders reconstruct history to suit their agenda in the changing political situation.

After decolonisation, a new generation of political leaders, who had struggled for freedom and assumed the status of freedom fighters, claimed to rule the newly independent countries. As rulers they were in need to legitimise their claims. This is why the concepts of the 'freedom struggle' and 'war of liberation' emerged with great lustre and romance. Sacrifices of these leaders have become dominant themes in recent history writing. In India and Pakistan, the role of these freedom fighters is highly eulogised in order to give them the right to rule the new nations. Interestingly, the British historians describe the freedom struggle as a 'transfer of power', implying that the change that took place was a 'voluntary surrender of power and not as a result of struggle. These two interpretations reflect two antithetical approaches to history.

Like most of the newly independent countries, Pakistan also had problems about how to reconstruct its history in order to legitimise its creation. It faced two problems: how to treat the colonial period, and how to justify partition. Most of the colonised countries have been sensitive about their colonial periods, which marked their humiliation, surrender and defeat. Dealing with these periods requires an acceptance of national and societal weak-

nesses in these countries. Pakistan found an easy solution. It looked at the whole period of colonisation as the Indian past because Pakistan had not existed at that time. It left it to the Indian historians to deal with the colonial period. However, the Pakistani historians had to grapple with a number of complicated and complex issues on the partition of India. While handling these, they kept in their minds the interests of the ruling classes.

In Pakistan, historiography has developed under the framework of the 'Pakistan Ideology', which is based on the idea of a separate Muslim nationhood and justifies the partition of India. The Pakistani historians are told from the very beginning to construct their history within this framework. It is well understood that whenever history is written under the influence of an ideology, its objectivity is sacrificed. Facts are manipulated in order to justify the political acts of leadership. Eric Hobsbawm has said: "Nationalist historians have - often been - servants of ideologists".² He observed: "History as inspiration and ideology has a built-in tendency to become a self-justifying myth. Nothing is a more dangerous blindfold than this, as the history of modern nations and nationalism demonstrates".³

In power politics, an ideologically based historiography provides legitimacy to the political leadership. Michael W Apple poses the question: What does ideology do for the people who have it? He writes that it "distorts one's picture of social reality and serves the interest of the dominant classes in the society".⁴

Pakistani historians also face the problem of how to deal with the ancient past. Islam came to the Indian subcontinent in the 8th century. On the basis of the two-nation theory, the ancient Indian past does not belong to the new country. A teacher and a Jamat-i-Islami member, Asadullah Bhutto, once gave a press statement that Mohenjo Daro and other such archaeological remains should be bulldozed as

they do not belong to Islam. Turning their attention to the early Islamic past, the historians seek an Islamic link with the Arab conquest of Sindh, known in history textbooks as "the door of Islam" ('bab al-Islam'). According to them, the conquest of Sindh made the Indian Muslims a part of the Arab empire. This makes them more enchanted with the glories of Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, and Cordoba than with the Indian counterparts of Delhi, Agra or Fatehpursikri. They also trace central Asian links. A reputed Pakistani archaeologist and historian, A H Dani, has said that Pakistan has closer and stronger cultural links with central Asia than with India.

How one treats medieval Indian history is also problematic. During this period, Muslim dynasties ruled over India but the centre of power was situated in India and not in the area that constituted the new country of Pakistan. Though the period is reconstructed under the title of History of Pak-Hind, there are some fundamentalists who totally reject the rule of the Muslim dynasties as being un-Islamic on the grounds that the Muslim rulers preferred to rule on the basis of secularism and did not establish an Islamic state. They inducted the Hindus in their administration and weakened the Islamic character of the state. These historians also condemn all attempts that led to the development of a composite culture. I H Qureshi, a leading historian, criticised the policy of cooperation with Hindus that was enunciated by Mughal rulers, especially Akbar, who included Hindus as partners and treated them equally.

Qureshi has argued: "And in the final analysis, if the Muslims were to forget their uniqueness and come to absorb as Akbar did, contradictory tendencies and beliefs from other religions, could the Muslim nation continue to exist as a separate nation? Akbar's policies created danger not only for the Muslim empire but also for the continued existence of the Muslim

nation in the sub-continent".⁵ Akbar is much maligned in the Pakistani historiography and is completely omitted from the school textbooks.⁶

Recently in an article entitled "At Last the Fall Became our Destiny", a Jamat-i-Islami intellectual wrote: "After Muhammad bin Qasim, all conquerors invaded India for plunder and not for (the) propagation of Islam. They had no desire and passion for holy war. Some of them conquered territories after shedding Muslim blood and assumed the royalty that was similar to the Romans and the Persian rulers."⁷ He condemned them for emulating the practices of the non-Muslim kings. "They built palaces and castles for their luxurious living and personal protection, kept slave girls for their sexual satisfaction, and recruited eunuchs to watch the conduct of their women. Following the traditions of the Pharaohs, they even built tombs for their queens."⁸

He said that the reason for the downfall of the Muslim rule in India was the attempt to create a composite culture. When Akbar and other Mughal rulers adopted the policy of marrying Hindu women, the process of polluting the Muslim culture began, which ultimately led to the disintegration of the Mughal empire. He wrote: "When the Mughal rulers married Hindu women and allowed them to keep their religion and worship according to their religion, it was disaster. As a result of these marriages, Mughal rulers were born from Hindu mothers."⁹ Medieval Indian history is not regarded as a part of the Pakistani historiography because the Hindus and the Muslims both shared it. The culture that was produced by both is looked upon as a denial of Muslim separateness.

Problems Posed by Recent History

In dealing with the recent history of the freedom struggle, the emphasis has shifted from the freedom struggle to the "struggle for Pakistan". The Congress, dominated by Hindus, is considered to be the main adversary because it did not recognise the Muslim community as a separate one and opposed partition. This approach makes the Hindus more hostile to the Muslims, than the British. Therefore, the creation of Pakistan is regarded as a victory against the Hindus and not against the British.

The reconstruction of the regional histories poses another problem. How does one adjust them in the ideological frame-

work? In the case of Punjab, its Sikh period is rejected and downgraded as the 'Sikha Shahi', which is synonymous with anarchy and disorder. The wars of the Sikhs, which were fought against the British, have no place in the history textbooks. On the other hand, the British conquest of Punjab is hailed as a blessing for the people of Punjab because it delivered them from Sikh rule.

The British ignominiously defeated the Talpur Mirs, the rulers of Sindh, in 1843. To minimise the humiliation of the defeat, historians attempt to glorify some individuals who fought bravely against the British. Sindh is given credit because its legislative assembly was the first to vote for joining Pakistan. The North West Frontier Province is remembered for its resistance to colonial rule but the allegiance of its political leadership to the Congress is condemned. The political leadership and not the people are blamed. On Baluchistan, the resistance of the Kalat state not to accede to Pakistan is not mentioned in the schoolbooks.

Pakistani historiography tries to homogenise the culture, traditions, and social and religious life of the people. This suits the political attempts towards centralisation. Any attempt to assert the historical identity of a region is discouraged and condemned. This also affects the non-Muslim religious minorities, who are also excluded from the mainstream of history.

Pakistan has passed through a number of political crises. It has experienced military dictatorships, corruption of feudal democracy, the separation of East Pakistan, the rise of fundamentalism and ups and downs in relations with India. History textbooks became the victim. History as a subject was discontinued in 1961 and was incorporated into the textbooks on social science.

Textbook writers are allowed to select only those portions of history, which suit the ruling party in power. Michael W Apple observes: "Selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture."¹⁰

When there is democracy, the army rule is blamed for all existing problems. When the army comes to power, it accuses politicians and democracy for causing

disorder and corruption. Even when there is a democratic change, the past government is condemned for political and economic problems. As George Orwell said: "All history is a palimpsest scraped clean and reinscribed, exactly as often as is necessary. The past is written in the light of the present requirements of the authoritarian government."¹¹

The disjointed and selected version of history fails to create any historical consciousness among students and the general public. When full facts of historical processes are not recorded, it reduces the power of analysis and society is condemned to repeat its history again and again. EPW

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Notes

- 1 Marc Ferro, *The Use and Abuse of History*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984, p vii.
- 2 Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, Abacus, London, 1999, p 35.
- 3 Ibid, p 47.
- 4 Michael W Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980, pp20, 21.
- 5 I H Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indian Sub-Continent, 1962*, p 167.
- 6 Mubarak Ali, *History on Trial*, Lahore, 1999, pp 76-82.
- 7 Zahid Ali Wasti, 'And the Fall became a Destiny', (Urdu article) in *Awaz*, No 9, October-December 1999, pp 247, 248.
- 8 Ibid, p 248.
- 9 Ibid, pp 250-57.
- 10 Apple, p 6.
- 11 George Orwell, *Selected Writings*, Heinemann Educational Books, London 1976, p 165.