

## **THE RISE OF RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND COMMUNALIZATION OF HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN ASSESMENT**

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### **Abstract**

*Wars, invasions, settlements, sultanates and empires were considered legitimate until 20th century when they were delegitimized by the League of Nations and the United Nations. From Aryans to Arabs, Turks, Mughals and the British, the Indian subcontinent was invaded and ruled by rulers of different descents. But it was English historian, James Mill who had divided the Indian history on communal lines as the Hindu period, the Mohammedan (Muslim) period and the British period in his famous book, History of British India published in 1817. This book divided the people of India in two unified religious binaries of Muslims and Hindus which were never seen in that way before. After James Mill many British, Muslim and Hindu authors bought that communalized version of history and wrote books on similar lines. However, it was General Zia-ul-Haq who started the project of systematically communalizing the history textbooks in Pakistan in 1980s and then similar project got grounds in India in 2000s when right wing Hindutva party, Bhartya Janata Party (BJP) rose to power in India and history text books were altered. In this paper an attempt is made to study how history has been systematically communalized in Indo-Pak subcontinent to suit the political ends and what havoc it is*

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*doing with the people of Pakistan and India. This research will also explore how the upsurge of religious extremism in Pakistan after 1980s and more recent Muslim lynching in India are linked with communalizing the history textbooks in Pakistan and India.*

**Keywords:** *Historical Myths, Communalism, Hindutva, Communalization of Textbooks, India and Pakistan*

## **1. Introduction**

The project of communalization of history in the Indian sub-continent has given rise to religious extremism in both Pakistan and India. The religious militancy in both countries draws arguments from the communalized version of the history of the sub-continent and builds its narrative on the historical divide of Muslims as rulers and Hindus as subjects. But interestingly it was neither any Indian nor any Pakistani historian who had started communalizing the history in the region, rather it was done by a British Historian, James Mill. In 1817 James Mill in his book *History of British India* for the first time divided the history of the Indian subcontinent in the Hindu, the Muslim and the British periods.

The communalization of history in Pakistan started under official patronage around late 1950s and early 1960s. However, it was General Zia-ul-Haq who had introduced it systematically in textbooks as part of his Islamization project. As communalization of history in Pakistan is already well researched and well known in Pakistan, therefore, in this paper focus shall be on the project of communalization in India which is more recent and less known in Pakistan.

This paper is divided into three major sections. In section one, James Mill's subjectivity is discussed, and it is explained why he chose to divide the Indian history in Hindu, Muslima and British periods. In second section, the process of communalization in Pakistan is discussed and in third section communalization of history in India is discussed in detail. The third section is the longest section as communalization of politics in India is the focus of this paper.

In the third section, it is explained how communalization of history got grounds in India. Specially focusing on how in 1990s and 2000s rise of the right-wing Hindutva party, Bhartya Janata Party (BJP) in Indian politics related to the

communalized version of history in India. Like General Zia, the history text books in India were altered by the BJP government in early 2000s. An attempt is done to study how history has been systematically communalized in India to suit the Hindutva politics of BJP and how Muslim lynching in India is linked with communalization of history in India.

## **2. Research Questions**

This study starts with the question why British historian, James Mill had divided the Indian history in Hindu, Muslim and British period? How far his subjectivity accounted in his analysis and what might be his real motives. Then I look at how this controversial communal description of history is later used in India and Pakistan to further the agenda of communal politics in the both countries. Specially focusing on the Indian case study, I look at how by changing the text books and creating a communal discourse BJP rose to power in India and how the Modi regime's policies of ban on cow slaughter and lynching of the Indian Muslims are connected to the project of communalization of the history.

## **3. Research Methodology**

This is basically a qualitative desk research relying on secondary data collected from primary and secondary sources. The history books, research articles and history text books taught in Pakistan and India are used to analyze how history has been communalized in India and Pakistan. This research draws a theoretical insight from the theories of Social Constructionism and Instrumentalism. Historical writings specially those written with official support like by the historians who are closely associated with the state or employs of the state or empire and the history taught through textbooks are written with an agenda and a political motive.

## **4. James Mill and his Subjectivity**

History is always subjective to some extent as historians themselves accept history can never be completely objective. American historian Susan A. Crane says, "Historian-as agents, as historical actors-construct narratives about the past that would never exist without some amount of self-assertion, choice, desire, fortitude, and above all writing, all of which must come from somebody, a single person, namely the historian". (Crane, 2006, p. 434). Therefore, it is of immense importance that who is writing the history, what is his association with the

government and the state, the timing of the writing and the political purpose of writing the history.

One English historian, James Mill wrote a book on Indian history titled *History of British India* published in 1817. In this book he had divided the Indian history on communal lines as the Hindu period, the Muhammadan period and the British period and discussed the character, the arts, history, religion, literature and laws of the people of India (Mill, 1826). Before James Mill no historian of India had described the Indian history in those three binaries-the Hindus, the Muslims and the British. Moreover, he not only divided the history on those communal lines but also, he put them directly in confrontation with each other. James Mill starts his book III chapter I on Mohammedans with these words,

*At the time when the nations of Europe opened their communication with India, by the Cape of Good Hope, the people whom we have now described had for a number of ages been subject to a race of foreigners. That subjection, though it had not greatly altered the texture of native society, had introduced new forms into some of the principal departments of state; had given the military command to foreigners; and had mixed with the population proportion of a people differing from them considerably, in manners, character, and religion. The political state of India, at the time consisted of a Mohammedan government, supported by a Mohammedan force, over a Hindu population (Mill, 1826, p.165).*

In the paragraph above, Mill described Mohammedans (Muslims) as “foreigners” and the relationship between “Hindus” and “Mohammadans” as patron-client relationship, the Hindu subjects and the Muslim rulers. In this sentence, he makes Muslims the government, the state and the military force of the Indian subcontinent, “The political state of India, at the time consisted of a Mohammadan government, supported by a Mohammedan force, over a Hindu population.” This simplistic description of Hindus as subjects and Muslims as ruling communities’ glasses over many historical facts. Like what he calls the Hindu period includes the reign of great Buddhist ruler Ashoka, the great and during the Mohammedan period, majority of the cabinet members under slave kings and Mughuls were Hindus. Moreover, Hindu Rajput tribes often provided the major chunk of the military force under so-called Mohammedan rule. Therefore, this labeling and communalizing the Indian history by James Mill must be seen in the light of the subjectivity which he brings to his story telling.

James Mill, the father of famous utilitarian philosopher James Stuart Mill was a Scottish historian who never set a foot on the Indian soil, still went ahead to write one of the most influential but controversial work on the Indian history. This book helped James Mill to secure a permanent position with the East India Company as he had defended the foreign invasion of British while at the same time questioning the foreign invasions of Mohammedans in his book. Mill for almost half of his life served the British East India company and was considered as “undisputed spokesperson for British imperialism” (Tunick, 2006, p.586). His book *History of British India* is a classic case of imperial self-congratulation. It contains a complete denial and rejection of the Indian culture and civilization while glorifying the civilizing mission of Great Britain as part of the ‘White Man’s burden’.

Apart from the personal benefit and subjectivity of James Mill which is obvious on face of it. This style of history telling by James Mill had a political motive as well. His division of the Indian History into Hindu, Muslim and British periods was in line with the British policy of divide and rule in India. On one hand this over-simplified version of history helped the British to discredit the Muslim rulers and on the other it helped them show how benign the British imperialism was as compared to the Muslim rulers. James Mill book helped construct a notion that Hindus (Indians) in the medieval period (Muslim period) were suffering under the Muslim tyranny. In extension to this the British colonial master projected the concept that the British rule had freed the Hindus from the tyranny of Muslims.

### **5. Communalization of History in Pakistan**

The communalization of history in Pakistan started in 1950s and 1960s, as part of the nation-building process. Like leading Pakistani historian, I.H. Qureshi wrote a book, *The Muslim Community of the Indian Sub-Continent* in 1962. In this book he argued that “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” (Qureshi, 1962, p. 167). Similarly, S. M. Ikram (1964) and Aziz Ahmed (1964) further explained in their books that how Islamic culture and civilization are different from the Hindu culture and

civilization. Hence, an attempt was made to build Pakistani nationalism on communal lines explaining the differences with Hindu community.

However, the communalization of the history in Pakistan became more obvious after 1979 onwards when the military government of General Zia-ul-Haq introduced Pakistan Studies and Islamiyat as compulsory subjects to promote his project of Islamization. Aminah Muhammad-Arif is of the opinion that, "Communalization of the Pakistani education system is twofold: it is prevalent both in the place occupied by religion in textbooks and in the way that India and Hindus are portrayed" (Mohammad-Arif, 2005, p.146). Zia-ul-Haq's attempt of Islamizing the medieval Indian history in Pakistani textbooks is well researched and documented.

There is some very commendable research available in Pakistan now which covers how history has been communalized in Pakistan since Zia-ul-Haq's times. K. K. Aziz wrote a book *The Murder of History: A Critique of History Textbooks Used in Pakistan* which was originally published in 1993 was the first serious attempt in this regard. In this book K.K. Aziz points out factually wrong information which had been used in history textbooks in Pakistan to teach the Islamized version of the history. In 2003 A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim had compiled a series of articles on this subject for Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) titled, "The subtle subversion: the state of curricula and textbooks in Pakistan, Urdu, English, Social Studies and Civics". Apart from the above mentioned two books, Hoodbhoy and Nayyar (1985), Jalal (1995), Saigol (2002) and Rosser (2005) also discuss in different ways that how communalized version of history is used in textbooks in Pakistan.

There are some studies done on comparison of the communalization project in India and Pakistan as well. Like Sanjay Joshi (2010) studied high school history textbooks from both India and Pakistan to see how Indian textbooks consider any influence coming from outside the geographical boundaries of India as 'foreign'; while Pakistani textbooks put so much stress upon Pakistan's connection with the Muslim world and the Middle East. On the other hand, Aminah Mohammad-Arif (2005) analyses how nationalism is crafted along communal lines in both India and Pakistan.

## **6. Communalization of History in India**

The process of communalization of history in India was different from Pakistan because Indian National Congress (INC) stood for united India and under Nehru as the Prime Minister of India after partition, it had gradually adopted secularism as sort of state policy of India. Moreover, since independence in 1947, the Muslim minority in India had voted en bloc for Congress, therefore, communalization of history did not suit the political agenda of the Indian National Congress, the ruling party of India. Although the word “secular” itself was made part of the preamble of the Indian constitution only in 1976 by the 42nd Amendment, Secularism was the official mantra followed by the Indian state under Nehru since early 1950s.

After independence from British rule Muslims mostly voted for Congress because they considered Congress as only secular party, which could have saved them against the communal extremist outfits like Rashtrya Sevak Sangh (RSS) and Hindu Mahasabha in India. Specially, after the rise of coalition governments from 1967, it was believed that Muslims despite being a minority could swing the election results in India. Muslims accounted for about fourteen percent of the total population in India, therefore, they were often considered as one of the largest potential voting constituency due to the belief that Muslims could be mobilized to vote en bloc for one party or a candidate.

Although Communalism was not followed as declared state policy under the Congress rule, still the history of India is full of communal riots between the Hindu and Muslim communities since partition of the sub-continent in 1947. There is abundant literature available on communal violence in India. Panday (1990) traces the history of communal violence in India since colonial phase in his book, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. Apart from Panday, Brass (2004), Sharma (2000), Asghar Ali Engineer (2004) and Berenschot (2012) have covered the communal violence against Muslims in detail in their books. Their accounts clearly show communal violence has remained essential part of the Indian polity over last seventy years.

The project of communalization of history textbooks in India is although a new phenomenon introduced by the BJP government in early 2000s but communalized history books written by ultra-Hindu nationalists are surely not new phenomenon in India. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was founded in 1925 by K. B.

Hedgewar in Nagpur, India and since its birth RSS derives its political ideology from the Muslim hatred. Hedgewar used to describe Muslims as “hissing Yavana snakes” and in words of famous Indian historian Irfan Habib he had developed his own version of Two-Nation theory portraying Hindus and Muslims as two nations always at war with each other- one Muslim nation always “brutally assaulting” while the other, Hindu nation “nobly defending” (Habib, 2002).

K.S. Lal was the first Indian historian who started writing communalized history books on medieval period. His first book was History of Khaljis which was published in 1950 and second book was Twilight of the Sultanate published in 1963. His book Growth of Muslim Population in Medieval India was published in 1973 in which he had argued that between the years AD 1200 to AD 1500 the Indian population had declined from 190 to 120 million because of the large-scale massacres of the Hindu population conducted by the Muslim rulers. It is interesting that he makes such quantitative claims for those pre-census times without providing any datasets or references from where exactly he had derived those numbers, but his claim is taken by the RSS as a gospel truth.

Later K.S. Lal wrote the Mughal Harem in 1988 in which he discussed the scandals of Mughul rulers and their immoral activities. In 1990 he wrote, Indian Muslims: Who Are They where he tried to prove that Islam was not spread by the peaceful message of Sufis and Mashaikhs but only by brute force and by the chance of employment opportunities etc. He wrote, “while it would not be safe to declare that hardly any conversions through peaceful methods were affected by the Sufi Mashaikh in India, it has also to be admitted that not many reliable references to their proselytizing activity are available in genuine hagiological works. ... the Mashaikh were probably responsible only for stray and individual conversions and their contribution to the growth of Muslim population may not have been much.” He also wrote, The Legacy of Muslim Rule in India in 1992 and Theory and Practice of Muslim State in India in 1999.

K.S. Lal has been blamed by his opponents as the spokesperson of RSS and BJP. In a way this blame was substantiated when in 2001 he was made chairman of the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR). The BJP government led by the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpai later made him member of the committee on the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) which was



authorized to draft the model school syllabus of Indian History on communal lines.

Apart from K.S. Lal, Sita Ram Goel wrote *Heroic Hindu resistance to Muslim invaders, 636 AD to 1206 AD* in 1994, *The Story of Islamic Imperialism in India* in 1996 and *Hindu Temples - What Happened To Them: Volume 1* in 1998. Hilal Ahmed (2014) in his book *Muslim Political Discourse in Postcolonial India: Monuments, Memory, Contestation* writes in detail how communalized version of history in India which was written after 1850 had communalized the historic monuments like Qutub Minar and Jama Masjid in Delhi and the Taj Mahal in Agra. He also explains how Babri Mosque became victim of all this communalization of historical monuments in 1992 and was demolished by the ultra-nationalist Hindu extremist groups.

The supporters of Hindutva claim Aryans were the original indigenous citizens of Indian and they were the Hindus and they gave civilization to the world carrying it from India. For this they use Koenraad Elst's book *Update on the Aryan Invasion Debate* which was published in 1999 and David Frawley's book *The Myth of Aryan Invasion of India* published in 2005. Therefore, they are averse to any claims of Dravidians as the indigenous people of India because it questions their claims of Aryans as the indigenous people of India.

David Frawley is an American Hindu teacher who has written about thirty books on Vedas, Hinduism, Ayurveda etc. and he was awarded Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award by the Indian government in 2015. Both books are not considered well researched scientific studies as they lack scientific vigour and were published by the famous RSS's own publishers based in New Delhi. Therefore, they are not considered authentic but among RSS circles they are very famous.

The communalized Hindutva version describes Muslim rulers as foreigners, invaders and barbarians who had trampled and destroyed the Indian civilization. The crux of the argument of the communalized Hindutva version of Indian history is that the Indian civilization had achieved great heights of civilization and progress in ancient times (the Hindu period) and then came the dark ages of Jainism and Buddhism in India when Prakrit (not Sanskrit) and Ahimsa (non-violence) were promoted and varna (caste system) was forgotten. In their communalized version the final death blow to the Hindu civilization of India

came when Muslim foreigners during medieval period attacked India and destroyed everything with their tyrannical rule.

This Hinduised version of Indian history has been taught in RSS based Saraswati Shishu Mandirs and Vidya Bharati primary and secondary schools since 1950s. RSS owned publishers Saraswati Shishu Mandir Prakashan publishes those books where except Hindus all other communities living in India are portrayed as foreigners specially targeting Muslims as oppressors and tyrants. With BJP in power by early 2000s they started making changes in Indian text books taught in government schools on same lines.

According to Romila Thapar, the renowned Indian historian, the most important omission in new text books is the mention of eating of beef in ancient times because it clearly goes against the policies of “beef ban” of the BJP government. Romila Thapar claims beef eating during ancient times is proved from Vedic sources Shatapatha Brahmana 3.4.1.2 and the Vasishtha Dharmasutra 4.8, both sources mention serving beef to guests (Thapar, 2002). This means the association of strict vegetarianism to Hinduism was introduced much later and it was not practiced during the so-called golden Hindu age of ancient times. This small omission from history text books helps the BJP government to enforce the beef ban and has caused havoc with the lives of the Muslim community.

Since the installation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government in India in 2014, cattle slaughter was banned in most of the states where BJP and its coalition partners had formed the governments. Sangh parivar’s cow vigilante groups emerged in the name of ‘cow protection’ in several Indian states and started mob attacks on illegal cow smugglers and Muslims allegedly keeping cow meat in their refrigerators. In this regard the murder of fifty-two years old, Akhlaq Ahmed, from Bisara village, near Dadri, Uttar Pradesh became a high-profile case in 2015.

The New York based Human Rights Watch (HRW) has reported at least forty-four people which included thirty-six Muslims had been killed and about 280 injured in more than one hundred attacks that took place between May 2015 and December 2018 in different states in India (Lain, February 28, 2019). The HRW report claims these vigilante groups in most cases had received support from the law enforcement agencies and the Hindu nationalist politicians. When law

enforcement agencies themselves are alleged to be involved in mob lynching of Muslims in India this clearly indicates where this communalized Hinduised version of history is taking India to. The journey of India from a secular state to a Hindu state is clearly built on the communalized version of history which teaches Indian kids to hate Muslims as foreigners and invaders.

The worst sufferers of this new BJP onslaught are secular Indian institutions and among them Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) based in New Delhi is at the forefront. The most internationally renowned historians of India like S.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar and Bipan Chandra who had written the Indian textbooks previously were not only sacked from National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) but also were maligned and termed 'Marxists', 'anti-Hindu', and 'anti-national'. Renowned Indian educationist, Sandeep Panday, the Magsaysay award winner and the founder of Asha for Education has written a book *Why I was Expelled from Banaras Hindu University* in April 2019 on this very issue. He wrote,

*The book 'Why I was expelled from Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, India is about how a parochial government led by Bhartiya Janata Party and its ideological parent Rashtriya Swayam sewak Sangh are bent upon destroying the academic environment of our campuses in an effort to take them over. This has happened campus after campus. Scholars have been made to leave, humiliated, events of organisations believing in ideology different from the Hindutva ideology of RSS/BJP have been cancelled on campuses at last moment if they were lucky to get initial permission, students have been suspended, unqualified people belonging to RSS have been appointed to top positions, mythology has been paraded as history/science, research is sought to be controlled, etc., since the BJP government came to power in 2014 (back page of the cover).*

## **7. Conclusion**

We can observe from the whole discussion that communalized versions of history had been present in both Pakistan and India since partition in some form or the other. Moreover, there always have been religious institutions which teach communalized version of history in both countries like most of the religious seminaries and madressahs in Pakistan and RSS owned schools and mandirs in India. We can also observe that religious violence and extremist tendencies has

also been always present in both India and Pakistan in some form at certain levels. But all this gets to problematic proportions only when state becomes a tool in the hands of religious extremists and state adopts their versions in text books and formulates government policies on communal lines.

This had happened in Pakistan when General Zia-ul-Haq started communalizing the text books in Pakistan and Islamising the Pakistani state. The result was Pakistan which was a land of peace and prosperity became the land of extremism and violence in the name of religion. Pakistan later saw worst kind of violence was perpetrated in the name of religion not only against people from other faiths but also against the people of the same faith. By 1990s Pakistan became the hot bed of sectarianism, extremism and terrorism. Pakistani state is still grappling with the leftover of Zia's policies of communalizing the history.

It can be observed that under the BJP government of Prime Minister Vajpai India did the same mistake as communalization process of the text books was started and this coincided with the increase of violence in the name of religion in India. The lynching of Muslims in the name of cow protection by angry mobs in India shows where exactly the communalized history telling is taking to the masses. Things have gone from bad to worse under the current Modi government in India as all independent observers see rise in religious violence and extremism in India. The lives of not only Muslims but also that of lower castes and secular Indians have come under threat from vigilante extremist Hindu groups.

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