

Indigenous Cultures and Their representation in Textbooks

Social Sciences

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Abstract

In the process of nation building and promoting national integration, states use public education system as tool to construct national identity and collective self. This article deals with the means and processes of construction of Pakistani national identity through textbooks of Pakistan Studies and will focus on the depiction of regional identities and how they are accommodated in the larger National identity.

Key Words: National Identity, Nationalism, National Integration.

Introduction

For the process of conjuring national collective self, emphasis on external differences is as important a factor as internal similarities and commonness. Thus, both elements commonly present in the culture and the absence of these very elements with respect to other cultural groups play a crucial role in formulating a common consciousness. In context of Pakistan, the common element between various cultures in the region that became Pakistan was the religion (however there was a significant non-Muslim minority as well) that served as a cohesive bond between the people and became foundational in making a Pakistani 'self'. While formulating an identity on the basis of religion Islam, the element of external difference and logical negation became Hinduism. Since India is attributed as a country of extremist Hindus, it serves as a component signifying the external difference. Thus in the final

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analysis, Pakistan becomes what India is not and India becomes what Pakistan is not; both juxtaposed as the negation of each other.

However, this paper will focus on the concept of 'other' which is not external to the 'self' but is a very part of it. This is a part of the self which pose a permanent threat to the self, hence must be kept in check, for once it is let lose, it will destroy the very self from within. Thus it is represented as enemy within. In her analysis, Rubina Saigol (Saigol, 2005) discusses this concept of 'enemy within' with reference to the Bengali nationalism which ultimately resulted in breakup of the 'self' which is Pakistan. However, here we will extend this domain from its narrow connotations to include the entire category of 'cultural other' that exists within. The goal is to deconstruct the text from the perspective of indigenous cultures in order to reveal how they are represented in the official books.

Scope of Study

The present study has selected the textbooks of Pakistan Studies, produced by the Balochistan Textbook Board, that are presently taught in schools and colleges of Balochistan. The Board prepares textbooks for Matric (class 9th, 10th) and Intermediate level (11th, 12th), both in English and Urdu medium of instruction. Thus, there are four books in total that constitute the subject matter of the research. These books are "Pakistan Studies for Class IX-X", "Mutalya-i-Pakistan Barai Jamat Daham", "Mutalya-i-Pakistan Barai Intermediate", "Pakistan Studies Intermediate". First three textbooks are produced by Balochistan Textbook Board, however, last mentioned textbook is produced by National Book foundation. As the provincial Board does not produce textbook for Intermediate level presently, the Balochistan Board recommends the textbook of National Book Foundation instead.

The Indigenous Cultures

The official discourse in the textbooks of Pakistan Studies about the local customs and ways of living is very much negative in its tone. The indigenous cultures are depicted as pre-modern, archaic and less than civilized. It has no match to the Pakistani identity that is based on eternal principles of Islam. The local cultures are carefully contrasted not against the practices of the Muslims but Islamic principles. Often times, these regional modes of life which were existing in the part that later became Pakistan are associated with the debate about the corruption in a public discourse. State and its functionaries are considered modern and serve as an agent of change, while on other hand the local mores are taken as primitive, thus handicap in way of development. Farzana Shaikh (Shaikh, 2009) writes:

“Three main assumptions have flowed from this idea of corruption as a feature of the indigenous order in Pakistan – the first is that corruption is inherently a feature of the indigenization of the post-colonial state, which so long as it was under the control of so-called modern elites had successfully withstood its damaging effects by appealing to the ethic of public service sanctioned by the rule of law. The second is that the indigenization of the Pakistani state heralded the return of old feudal and tribal classes, whose customary modes of predatory authority had been legitimized by the electoral democratization. Third is the elected politicians, who have been the chief beneficiaries of this process.”

All of these factors mentioned above are related in one way or another to the local cultures. This is primarily because of the nature of the state in postcolonial societies, which is completely different from states in Western European societies. In Europe, the national identities emerged through long historical processes, which in a course of time became entitled for statehood, thus giving rise to the modern idea of a nation-state.

But his process was completely opposite in postcolonial societies, in which it was the state that was to create a common nation instead of nation getting a state. Thus, after formal decolonization it was the state that entered the process of building nation from the scratch and work for national integration. Thus in the process, state became a primary agent for change which it tried to bring from above rather than initiate from below.

In this wake, the Pakistani state too entered the process of nation building through the help of public educational system. And during this process the local cultures which were divided along various regional, lingual, sect, class and other lines were seen as antithetical to national integration. Thus the government adopted the policy which either discouraged or did not talk about in our textbooks.

In our textbooks, the concept of culture is detached from its traditional understanding and is defined in religious terms. Consequently, all other ingredients of culture are either faded or called unauthentic. The only ingredient that is worthwhile in defining a culture is the religion of the people. All other elements that are crucial for shaping the culture of any area like history, customs, traditions, language, geography etc. are not considered as central. In one textbook, culture is divided into two levels. One is composed of what writers call the external elements while the other is

internal elements of the culture. It is the latter which is according to the writer plays a vital role not the former.

زبان، رنگ و نسل، لباس، چال ڈھال، مکانات کی تعمیر اور کھانے پینے کی اشیاء کا یہ فرق ثقافت کا خارجی اور ظاہری رخ کہلاتا ہے۔ ثقافت کا دوسرا رخ وہ ہے جس سے ایک قوم اپنے نظریات، مذہبی عقائد، ادب، تاریخ اور رسم و رواج سے پہچانی جاتی ہے۔ اس ثقافت کو داخلی یا باطنی پہلو کہتے ہیں۔ اور یہی پہلو دراصل قومی ثقافت میں زیادہ اہمیت کا حامل ہوتا ہے۔ بے شک ہم میں کچھ لوگ انگریزی لباس پہنتے ہیں۔ یورپی طرز کی عمارات میں رہتے ہیں، انگریزی زبان بولتے ہیں اور انگریزی کھانے کھاتے ہیں، مگر تہذیب و تمدن کی ان ظاہری تبدیلیوں کے باوجود ہمارے مذہبی عقائد، قومی نظریات، نصب العین نہیں بدلے۔ (Mutalia-i-Pakistan Barai Intermediate. Balochistan Textbook Board. P 101.)

(TRANSLATION: Language, race and color, behavior, dress-code, architecture and eating habits represents the external and apparent facet of culture. The other side of culture, which is composed of ideology, religious doctrines, literature, history and traditions, is called the internal aspect of culture. It is this aspect which incorporates the real essence of culture. No doubt we wear western dress, erect buildings on European style, speak English language and eat English food, but despite these apparent things, our religious doctrines, national ideology, and principles remain the same.)

This definition of culture based on religion can be highly problematic if applied to secular societies, where no differentiation is kept on the basis of faith. But nonetheless, this is the concept which defines our culture in the books. Furthermore, Pakistan is depicted as a country not with many regional variations of culture but hailing only one culture. That too is shown as a homogenous culture without any variations based on sectarian difference. Since culture is based on Islam, its origin is also traced back to the arrival of Muhammad bin Qasim in subcontinent.

مسلمان پہلی بار 712ء میں اس سرزمین پر فاتح کی حیثیت سے داخل ہوئے۔ یوں اس خطہ زمین میں ایک نئی ثقافت کا دور شروع ہوا جو اپنی بہت اور روح کے اعتبار سے بہت بلند پایہ تھی۔ اس عہد میں فن تعمیر، مصوری، خطاطی اور موسیقی کے فن کو ترقی ملی۔ یہ سب کچھ پاکستان کے ثقافتی ورثے کا حصہ ہے۔

(Mutalia-i-Pakistan Barai Intermediate. Balochistan Textbook Board. P 101)

(TRANSLATION: Muslims conquered this region for the first in 712 AD. This marked the beginning of new cultural era, which was at very high pedestal. This period also witnessed

the advancement of architecture, painting, calligraphy and music. These all are part of Pakistani cultural heritage.)

After founding the culture on religious definition, it automatically gets religious sanctity, thus asserting culture on any other basis makes that culture 'unislamic'. This is tantamount of violating the religion itself. Therefore, the public sphere for discussing such ideas like ethnic nationalism becomes much skewed and highly discouraged on religious grounds. This is one of many reasons that the textbooks are also replete with religious injunctions. Thus, there are many instances in textbooks that are categorical in declaring the local cultures as unislamic and the remnants of uncivilized past.

“Individual and collective lives of the people of Pakistan bear a deep imprint of Islam to whatever region, racial or linguistic group they may belong. Local customs and traditions, side by side, with racial, parochial and caste differences are also common. These are the remnants of the uncivilized local traditions.” (Pakistan Studies Intermediate. P 149)

Describing the local customs, textbook writes:

“In the rituals and customs regarding marriage and mourning, unislamic local tradition dominates.” (Ibid. P 120)

Thus, the local traditions stand as uncivilized and un-Islamic. Furthermore, the national culture of Pakistan is not the aggregate of all cultures present in Pakistan but it's a new culture that does not incorporate the regional cultures. It's very much exclusive in its nature rather than inclusive. In fact both national culture and regional cultures becomes the opposite of each other in such a way that one becomes a negation of the other. Thus Pakistani culture evolves not as aggregate of all cultures present in the country but it is a new invention. Since the national culture is civilized, the local cultures must bear the imprints of uncivilized past. Therefore, the regional cultures present in Pakistan are shown as part of problem rather than something that citizens should proudly follow.

Furthermore, it is interesting that textbooks mention nowhere the diversity in the population of Pakistan. It always depicts as if there are no cultural and ethnic variations in the population. Often times the existence of other nations is not acknowledged and is referred to as category of merely 'regional languages'. Thus, in the realm of politics, the stage is set for religion to play a decisive role in promoting national integration. It is the sole ingredient that forms the core of nation building process in Pakistan. Any reference to cultural element other than religion is to be highly discouraged.

پاکستانی ثقافت کی بنیاد دین اسلام ہے جو صرف عبادات اور مذہبی رسوم کا مجموعہ نہیں۔ بلکہ ایک مکمل نظام حیات ہے۔ اور
(Mutalia-i-Pakistan Barai Jamat Daham. Balochistan Textbook Board. P 181)۔

(TRANSLATION: Islam is the basis of Pakistani culture, which is not only confined to few rituals but is a complete code of life. And Islam is the only basis for our Unity, cohesion and harmony)

Further, it is unpatriotic to talk in terms of these local cultures. The credential and loyalty of the individual becomes dubious if he/she tries to talk with reference to his cultural identity. The discourse is set in a way that regional cultures becomes a nemesis of national integration, thus becomes associated with the plot of enemy that is ever looking for a moment to disintegrate the country.

“There are many people inside the country and out who are at loss in realizing that Pakistan was a reality and that it were destined to live forever. These elements were ready to go to any extent to undo Pakistan. They believed that Pakistan could be disintegrated by giving rise to the sentiments of parochialism and regionalism among the people.” (Pakistan Studies Intermediate. P 38)

Thus it becomes a threat to the very existence of the country and also the biggest challenge to forge national unity. Therefore, any political discourse about regions or identity based on regional cultures is equated with enemy's plot. It does not end here, even the concepts of federalism and provincial autonomy is looked upon with suspicion. Politically, it is undemocratic to organize people on regional, ethnic or provincial lines.

رنگ، نسل اور ذات پات کا کوئی فرق اور تمیز روا نہ رکھی جائے۔ شہری کو جمہوری حق کا درست استعمال کرنا چاہئے اور
جماعتی گروہ بندی، صوبہ پرستی، فرقہ پرستی اور قبیلہ نوازی جیسے غیر جمہوری رویوں سے بچنا جائے۔

(Mutalia-i-Pakistan Barai Jamat Daham. Balochistan Textbook Board. P 258)

(TRANSLATION: No discrimination is to be kept on the basis of color, race and caste. Citizens ought to exercise their democratic right wisely and avoid undemocratic attitude of

political groupings, provincialism, sectarianism and tribal affiliations.)

Moreover, what is interesting here is that when the problems of federation and regions are mentioned in textbooks, it is always categorized with other problems of heinous nature. For example, it is not only the conspiracy of a foreign hand, but is also grouped together with the crimes of terrorism and sectarianism. The above mentioned passage is exactly doing the same. It clubs together elements which are very different in their natures but books condemn them with broad stroke. Political parties are the basic ingredient for political process. Genuine democracy could not exist without free functioning of political parties. Similarly, provincialism is not an anti-democratic principle. Wherever the population is diversified, the principles of provincialism and federalism become very important tools for running the administrative machinery of the state while keeping the state united. In fact strong provinces guarantee the unity of the country. But it is discouraged and termed as undemocratic.

But putting party loyalties and provincialism in the category of tribalism and sectarianism is highly problematic. Sectarianism and racism are condemned throughout the world. They are not tolerated anywhere. But unfortunately, no difference is kept between the political concepts and sectarian and racial discrimination. This is further intensified as in the following passage.

ایک اور مسئلہ جو ہمیں درپیش ہے فرقہ واریت، صوبائیت، نسلی و لسانی تعصب، دہشت گردی اور تخریب کاری کا ہے۔ (ibid, P 253)

(TRANSLATION: Another problem which we are facing is that of sectarianism, provincialism, racial and linguistic bias, terrorism and sabotage.)

Furthermore, the difference between the concepts of Race with that of identity based on common history, customs and language is blurred, which creates confusion in the minds of young generation. Both are separate concepts. The concept of Race is based on biological factors. With its associated connotations of racial superiority, inferior race and its history full of discrimination and violence is a highly controversial issue, which culminated in the rise of Nazi Germany. This concept of Race is extinct from social science vocabulary now and is condemned in all its forms. However, identity based on common culture and ethno-linguistic lines is a distinct phenomenon. Struggling for political rights on these very basis is a universally acknowledge political act. But unfortunately, the concept of

Nation based on common culture is treated like the abominable concept of Race.

It is this stereotypical narration of books that pollutes the young minds with an attitude which is not conducive for fostering democratic norms. With blatant disregard and contempt for local cultures, it is conveniently grouped with the sectarianism, terrorism, sabotage and subversion. Instead of promoting national unity and democratic principles, these are the very causes for our failure as a democratic state that is divided along various lines.

“Our country comprises of four provinces. These have somewhat different cultural linguistic and ethnic characteristics. But unfortunately due to the conspiracies of the unpatriotic elements these differences have become a challenge for national integration. . . they take pride in calling them Punjabis, Sindhis, Pakhtoons or Balochis [sic] and not Pakistanis. If these disruptive tendencies are allowed to have a freehand, they may become a real challenge for our national integrity.” (Pakistan Studies Intermediate, P 150)

It is also pertinent to note here that textbooks also draws similarities and equate the local cultures to that of pre-islamic Arabia, which is referred to as age of ignorance.

“Balochs were divided into clans and tribes a few centuries back, and had all the characteristics of the pre-Islamic Arab society.” (Ibid, P 253)

One of the key features of Arab’s age of ignorance was that various tribes had locked horns in a perpetual fight. Fighting would erupt out of petty issues, which will linger for decades. This is characteristic of barbarous nature of society, which is also ascribed to the local cultures of Pakistan. It is to note that these textbooks are produced by Balochistan Textbook Board, but nonetheless, highly contemptuous of the people living in Balochistan.

Furthermore, the treatment of women folks during the Arab’s age of ignorance is another chief characteristic which is assigned to local cultures.

“In a feudal setup, status of women is even worse; she is confined within the fortress like boundaries of the feudal houses like slaves women. Women are made to work as peasant and field labor in our rural areas. Honor killing of women is now a common practice. Our social system is generally inclined to favor men, woman is convicted notwithstanding the fallacy of the charge levied against her

and woman is not even given a chance to plead innocent [sic] in the court of law.” (Ibid, P 123)

On one more instance, there such a blatant disregard of all sensibilities regarding gender issues like:

“Majority of the women is chaste and observes ‘Pardah’.”
(Ibid, P 121)

It does not require much intelligence to get to the logical corollary of the sentence, which is written to promote Islamic culture in Pakistan as opposed to regional cultures. If majority of women observes ‘pardah’ and are chaste, then what about those women of Pakistan who do not observe ‘pardah’ according to the standards provided by Zia-ul-Haq. Are they not chaste? Where will these women folk stand in the grand scheme of Islamization of Pakistani society? Obviously, the answer for the question is difficult to say yet clear to all. Unfortunately, this is what we teach our young generation.

Religious Minorities

Despite the repeated assertions that the rights of minorities are well protected in Pakistan, the very notion of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ is based on discrimination. It takes for granted that it is justified for state to discriminate her citizen body according to the religion. Thus no amount of rights can justify the discrimination of citizens by the state on the basis of their faith. No matter how much we claim rights for religious minorities in Pakistan, it systematically marginalizes a significant portion of our society. States across the globe adopt policies that constrain the governmental authority to intervene in the matter of faith. There is bifurcation of individual’s public and private life. The public life of an individual is subject to the laws and authority of the state, while his private life is completely immune to the writ of government. States cannot intervene in the matters pertaining to his private life. Religion belongs to individual’s private life, thus state has no legitimate claim over religious life. But this difference is blurred while giving state a complete access to person’s private life.

Furthermore, rationality would demand to impart a sense of belonging and fair-handedness to all of its citizens irrespective of their faith, caste or creed. If state demands contributions from all of her citizens to its development and prosperity, it cannot afford to deny equal rights and status to some on the basis of their faith. Otherwise, those who are deprived are bound to develop a sense of alienation from the society. However in Pakistan, state not only

differentiates her citizens on the basis of religion but actually contribute to the marginalization of those who do not ascribe to the official religion.

The issue of representation of religious minorities while constructing national identity through textbooks has considerably changed particularly after 1970s. According to A. H. Nayyar, (A.H. Nayyar and A. Salim, eds, 2002, P 20) the textbooks produced before that period were substantially free of hate speech.

“The early history books contained chapters on both the oldest civilizations Moen Jo Daro, Harappa, Gandhara, etc., but also the early Hindu mythologies of Ramayana and Mahabharata and extensively covered, often with admiration, the great Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms of the Mauryas and the Guptas. The books indeed showed biases when discussing the more recent history of the politics of independence, but still one found school textbooks with chapters on Mr. M. K. Gandhi, using words of respect for him and admiring him for his qualities. Even in the somewhat biased history of politics of independence, the creation of Pakistan was reasoned on the intransigence of the Congress and its leadership rather than on ‘Hindu machinations’. Some books also clearly mentioned that the most prominent Islamic religious leaders were all bitterly opposed to the creation of Pakistan.”

However, after that period textbooks were re-written and not only did it expunge the Hindu past from textbooks but systematically duped it with hate content against Hindus and Hindu religion. Ulemas who had bitterly opposed the creating of Pakistan were turned into heroes and staunch supporters of it and Pakistan was called to have been created to establish an Islamic state in accordance to the teachings of Quran and Sunnah.

Furthermore, while formulating national identity purely on Islamic basis left out a sizable portion of non-muslim population of Pakistan. This change in the character of national identity from muslim nationalist during Ayub period to Shariah based Islamic identity took place during the eleven years rule of Zia regime. Scholars mostly agree that it was during this time that the ‘ideology of Pakistan’ came into full vigor. The Pakistani identity came to be formulated on the basis of canonical Islam in such a way that only Muslims became entitled for becoming a Pakistani, leaving out all the significant minorities in Pakistan like Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and later Ahmadis.

On the basis of this puritanical Islamic identity, history was also seen as ‘Islamic history’ against ‘Hindu history’. Consequently, the origin of Pakistan is traced back to the arrival of Muhammad bin Qasim and all the

prior history of subcontinent is systematically ignored along with Indus valley and Gandhara civilizations, which are part and parcel of Pakistan.

Not only that, after the creation of Pakistan, textbooks of Pakistan Studies were also purged from the achievements all those non-Muslims who have greatly contributed and served Pakistan to its wellbeing. For example the achievements of A. R. Cornelius, Dorab Patel, Sobho Gianchandani, Cecil Choudhry, Bapsi Sidhwa and many others are a source of pride for Pakistanis, whose service to the nation cannot be ignored at any cost. But today, our young generation is completely oblivious to these great names.

Thus, our national identity has relegated the non-muslim citizens of Pakistan to the degree that they become second-class citizens with lesser rights and privileges. Their patriotism and love for the country also becomes suspect, and their contribution to the society is ignored. The result is that they can easily cease to have any stake in the society, because our textbooks promote a view that Pakistan is for Muslims alone.

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