

Validation of the History of the Partition of India 1947: School Textbooks vs. other Historical Narratives

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Abstract

History can be understood in different ways. From school days, every individual gets a different perspective about history and historical events, it can be of nation, people, tradition or any object. The existence of multiple perspectives of a single event forces the students to question the truth, credibility and validity of each viewpoint and the event as a whole. School textbooks (Class X syllabi of ICSE and CBSE board) provide a curriculum that is required for the children to know. But do they cover the entire instances for that matter? Other historical narratives written by famous authors brings about another perspective that would change the whole idea of what everyone had learnt before. Thus, this validity of history the school textbooks and the other narratives creates a clear understanding on which history must be predicted.

Keywords: History, Children's literature, Partition of India, Historical Narratives, CBSE/ICSE textbooks

“Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it”-
Edmund burke

Past reflects the future. History plays a vital role in creating a new outlook that would bring about a change in idea about a nation, place, people or an object. The traumatic situations or the greatest achievements, sensitise emotions and feelings among the people who have experienced it. Among the others, who haven't faced any of those circumstances, focuses on writings and evidences, orally or through conduct, and understands the pain and agony those people went through. Therefore, this paper focuses on the validation of these writings versus the teachings at school- up to class 10, of the CBSE and ICSE curriculum. The subject chosen for this objective is the Partition of India.

Defining history

History has evolved ever since the existence of man. With passage of time, history forms a new perspective. History sometimes fan the flames and brings upon new ideologies that proves to inspire people. History of a nation implies the history of the people, their culture, tradition and their wellbeing. A nation is said to be a large group of people in which they share culture, religion, tradition and ethnicity. National identity arises when the nation is formed. Most of the nation formed, consists of migrants from other nations that questions the idea of citizenship rather than that of a membership in a nation. History developed a sense of scepticism among the people of a nation as to believe the past which can be unacceptable according to their culture or tradition. History can be defined only if it is understood in the same way it is interpreted.

The subject to which the focus is given in this paper, is the theme of Partition of India. Around 2500BC Indus Valley civilisation marked the beginning of a great nation, later known as India. When the people of Indus Valley civilisation

settled and lived a peaceful life, they were attacked by another Indo-Iranian race called the Aryans. Apart from all the other developments and new modes of education introduced by the Aryans, they were responsible to bring in the caste system. Later on, around 326 BCE, Alexander the Great came to the region around the river Indus and invaded few territories and thus India formed one whole nation to fight off the invader. Subsequently, many other empires came into picture- the Maurya Empire, the Gupta Empire, the Mughal Empire and so on. Eventually India got to form its complete nation after it gained independence from British in 1947. Partition of India was a decision taken after India informally received its independence.

Historical narratives and children

Historical narratives tracks the episodes of the people who have faced bitter experiences in their lives. Generally most of the people tend to conceal those facts as they feel to forget the past. These narratives are not just mere stories but experiences and probable truth.

Unlike ancient times, children of today have evolved a scientific temper that questions everything that is being told to them. Technological advancements and global transformation has led the children to differentiate what is wrong and what is the truth. Dr. Elke Schlote Gerhild Nieding, a Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Würzburg, Germany believes that children have developed an insight on questioning and understanding beyond their level of thinking. They are the future who can change the design of an ugly and a painful past after understanding it through from all dimensions.

Children of age 15, who studies history as their subject since primary school are being focussed here. History is like a story, but it should not be read and forgotten. As they study through their school textbooks, they tend to understand the sense of

belongingness and identity about their nation. India brings about a sense of pride to all these children who have read about the struggles and achievements of this nation. The tradition and culture that is followed since the past, gives a good example on the disciplined lifestyle in India, which helps the children appreciate Indian values.

Class 10 textbooks

This paper focuses on two syllabi: CBSE and ICSE. CBSE follows the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) textbook. This book covers the idea of world history at a glance. It provides a picture in the minds of the young readers that would help them understand how the world was during the past. It talks about the French Revolution, Nationalist movement in Indo-China, Industrialisation, Work and Lifestyle of people and the Global world. It also focuses on the Nationalism in India, but only till the episode where India gained Independence. NCERT claims that the revised texts is to show "India as the point of reference to understand all other civilisations. The change in the title of the book – the earlier title was World Civilizations-to India and the World is itself symptomatic of the change in perspective" (NCERT 3).

ICSE on the other hand, follows the *Longman History and Civics Textbook* which uses "narratives and critical approach while dealing with historical and political concepts" (4). This textbook elaborately includes the First War of Independence in India till India gained its Independence. It also provides a clear cut understanding of the Indian history through their simple language. It focuses on world history capturing World War 1 and World War 2 in detail.

Other narratives of Partiton

Every decision made in a country affects the people of that nation. When the partition of India was decided, it was not accepted by many people. In one of the newspaper, Urvashi Butalia remarked that women were killed by their own men. A country where people value their customs and tradition do injustice towards women. Butalia in one of her book *The Other Side of Silence*, narrates the actual incidents of many people who experienced painful and pathetic condition during the partition. She managed to interview most of the Hindus and Sikhs in the region of Punjab who left the place which is currently Pakistan for India. She explains the importance of knowing this history which reflects the agonising experiences of the people in India. In one of the excerpt of *The Other Side of Silence*, Butalia remarked that,

The political partition of India caused one of the great human convulsions of history... In the space of a few months, about twelve million people moved between the new, truncated India and the two wings, East and West, of the newly created Pakistan... Slaughter sometimes accompanied and sometimes prompted their movement; many others died from malnutrition and contagious diseases. Estimates of the dead vary from 200,000 (the contemporary British figure) to two million (a later Indian estimate) but that somewhere around a million people died is now widely accepted. As always there was widespread sexual savagery: about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion). Thousands of families were divided, homes destroyed, crops left to rot, villages abandoned.

Nowadays, when people blame the government for not providing the neccities, back then, the new governments of India and Pakistan were unprepared for the convulsion: they had not anticipated that the fear and uncertainty created by the drawing of borders based on headcounts of religious identity—so many Hindus versus so many Muslims—would force people to flee to what they considered 'safer' places, where they would be surrounded by their own kind" (30).

Ritu Menon, an author and a feminist writes in her book *Boarders and Boundaries* about the struggle of the women to ascertain their identity during the Partition. Many women were abducted by other religion men and forcing them to convert so as to get married or cohabitation. The women were only allowed to return when they agree to bear their child and leave it behind, so she would return getting ashamed. In one of the books written by Dr B.R.Ambedkar "Pakistan or Partition of India", it is clearly noted that both Hindus wanted a separate nation from that of Muslims. Similarly, Muslims also wanted the same as they both believe that they do not share the same bond.

How much of these historical narratives on Partition of India is shown in the school textbooks?

As mentioned above, CBSE and ICSE follow the history of India till it has gained Independence. A time period from First war of independence in 1857 up till India gained independence at 1947. But the whole idea of Partition came into picture after India gained its victory against Bristish. Few students were asked to comment on as to what they know about Indian history- Reshma, a student studying in 11th grade in Kerala said like this- After India gained Independence, half of the population were Muslims, especially in northern region. So the aim of the Muslims were to separate from India and go to Pakistan (basically a new nation). The reason is because that they know that the Hindus will take away their freedom mainly their religious freedom. She does not know anything about the hardships of the people during that time. Prijith(doing his 11th in Kerala) was the second student to whom the question was asked and he said like this- Earlier, both the people that is Mohammed Ali Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru were good friends. But due to some confusion, they both had a fight which led to the Partition of India. The reason could also be of some religious matter as India did not give religious importance then. He also claims that both of them still fights for the one that is over, which means India now is a secular country and gives importance to all religions. Jofin, a student pursuing Engineering in Kerala responded like this- India gained Independence on August 14, 1947. But due to the partition of India which led to two nations: Pakistan and India, we celebrate Independence on August 15, 1947. Sajeda, a student pursuing her degree in statistics in Sharjah, said like this- Partition led to two countries, India and Pakistan. Major riots preceded the partition and led to mass casualties. There were lot of refugees and lot of violence at that time. She also says something of partition of Bengal which happened before this, but could not recall much about it. Faathima Irfaanah, another student pursuing Medicine in Dubai, responded in a thought provoking manner- As far as she know and remembers from her earlier studies, the partition of India into countries as present India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka was preceded by the rule of East India Company following the

Mughal rule and other small invasions like Portuguese, French and Dutch. The East India company set up its supremacy in India after few other foreign invasions. The main reason of the partition is seen as a combined effect of 'Divide and Rule' policy of the British which divided Hindus and Muslims based on their castes, religion and beliefs. Events under this policy were taking place in different parts of the country and no party was ready to subside. She also thinks the East India Company also put a condition that if India and Pakistan separate, they would leave the country. Due to too many riots, intolerant behaviours and impatient waiting for Swaraj, Mahatma Gandhi, finally gave in to the condition after trying to prevent it to a very high extent. While few Muslims led their way into Pakistan, there were others who chose to stay back in India due to their love and respect for the country. Thus, initially, the partition resulted in India and Pakistan as two new countries. In subsequent years, India further divided into present Day India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

A proper analysis was to be made to know how many students actually know about the true history of India. School textbooks were their vital source to know about the history of India. When these textbooks failed to disclose the aftermath of the Partition in India, students also failed to understand them. When they were asked if they want to know about the Partition and its history, they eagerly came forward. Many Indian writers has written plenty of writings about the people who suffered during the Partition. Their sorrows are shared in these books, but are not influenced by most of the young readers. The writing style or the themes could be one of the reason as to why most of the young readers of today do not choose to read those books. In fact, they are not fake or untrue fiction stories, but real and genuine stories from the real people.

Students must be encouraged to read like these books from their home itself. Only then, history will reflect a new tone in young minds and helps them to take future decisions. It is not only achievements that matters, but also the failures that led to a massive destruction. India, a secular country, a growing and a developing nation, as each of us see today did mark a point in history which everyone must understand because that is the vital truth. Truth cannot be hidden forever, it will be revealed once and everyone must be ready to face it. Young readers are the future thinkers. They must know what went wrong and what is right. Decisions are made by them to make a brighter nation.

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