**Curriculum of Hate**

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Pakistan was created in 1947 as a homeland for the Muslims of North-West India. It was initially envisaged as a moderate state where minorities would have full rights. Quaid-e-Azam in his August 11, 1947, speech also declared Pakistan as a modern secular state. But Pakistani minorities’ struggles, roles and achievements in building Pakistan have been ignored and written out of history and even from textbooks. The mixing of religious nationalism and national ideology reached its peaks under the leadership of Zia al-Haq (1977-1988). Where, he ordered the Islamization of every section of the society and ordered the re-writing of history at all levels, to redefine the meaning of Pakistan.

The religious minorities are often portrayed in our textbooks as inferior or second-class citizens who have been granted limited rights and privileges by generous Pakistani Muslims, for which they should be grateful. Many history scholars mentioned in their writings–and I agree with them–that Pakistani textbooks have preached falsehoods, hatred and bigotry against minorities. They have constructed most non-Muslims, especially Hindus, as evil and primordial enemies and glorified military dictatorships. It is a general phenomenon that education is the main driver toward peace, prosperity and tolerance. It helps in the transformation of the precarious security situation into a peaceful environment and can lead to political stability and social development. Many studies suggest that education can help in reducing the risk factor of people turning to violent activities by engaging them in economic and political activities.

The findings of a report by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, concluded: “The trend toward a more biased curriculum towards religious minorities is accelerating. These grossly generalized and stereotypical portrayals of religious minority communities signal that they are untrustworthy, religiously inferior, and ideologically scheming and intolerant.”

Pakistan’s Sindh Assembly had failed to keep its promise to include the complete text of Mohammad Ali Jinnah’s speech of August 11, 1947, in textbooks.

Recently, I had a chance to go through the curriculum of Punjab and Sindh and I was astonished to see that hate material still exists in Pakistani school textbooks and that it needs to be removed from the country’s education system at the earliest.

Moreover, it also noted that Pakistan’s Sindh Assembly had failed to keep its promise to include the complete text of Father of the Nation Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah’s speech of August 11, 1947, in textbooks. He had said: “You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the State.” Only “a small portion of the speech” is included in textbooks as per my research.

While talking to Mohammad Saleem a senior teacher in Sukkur, it was learnt that unfortunately, textbooks being taught in private and government sector schools contain hate material and a minimum representation of religious minorities. He said it must be noted that hate material taught in schools is against Article 22 of the Constitution. “Moreover, schools have become factories where children are being churned out with warped mindsets,” he said.

Saira Ahmed, a renowned socio-political activist based in Sindh, while sharing a few points of research being done by a local organization said that most the teachers taught religion in classes rather than their own subjects. She said the institutions that taught religion solely should be separated from formal education because religion had no space in other subjects like science. She said the Supreme Court’s decision to revise the curriculum should be taken very seriously.

She quoted an example from the Sindh Textbook Board’s Class VII (age 11 to12) book on Islamic Studies: “Most of the [other] religions of the world claim equality, but they never act on it.”

Ali Mohammad Khashkeli, a government teacher, quoted some excerpts from textbooks; highlighting some of the shameful and intolerant perspectives being drilled into the minds of children. Those excerpts portrayed non-Muslims as negative, preached open hatred, and declared the Muslims superior. In some places, even eminent figures of other religions were regarded as inferior.

One of the female teachers, while sharing her thoughts said public education, should be separated from religious education.

She said students of other faiths than Islam should get equal opportunities to study their own religion. Further, she said the Government of Sindh should take practical steps for students belonging to Hindu, Christian, Sikh and other religious groups to study their own religions in school.

She said sadly, in Sindh, the minorities are forced to study Islamiyat and the school administration doesn’t allow them to study civics. She said ethics textbooks are not available in the market and, in schools, no teachers are available to teach this subject.

Also, ethics books are written from an Islamic viewpoint and the students who select Ethics are stigmatised by teachers and students.

This hatred had been created against non-Muslims for three decades through lessons in textbooks but none of the successive governments didn’t bother to remove such material. Hereby, I request and urge the Sindh government to revisit the curriculum and remove the hate material in textbooks.

I fear if hate material continued to be part of textbooks, society would ultimately bear its negative impact. Laws are made to ensure the provision of justice and equal rights to religious minorities but such things won’t happen until the majority changed its behaviour and attitude towards minorities.