

Secular vs. Religious History

Dr. Mubarak Ali is one of famous historians of Pakistan. He has a secular orientation. He has written many valuable books on the subject of socio-economic history. In his book "Tareekh ki Talash" (In Search of History), he has fervently criticized the approach of some Pakistani Historians.

In his opinion, the historians influenced by the religion have presented the history in a distorted way. They have spun a yarn to cut the relations of Pakistanis with Pre-Islamic Indian History. On the contrary, they have connected themselves to Central Asian and Arab civilizations in order to complete the historical train of thought flowing from Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to present-day Muslims. According to him, this distortion of history is one of the major reasons of extremism in the Pakistani society.

I have a different opinion in this case. There are two aspects of history: One element of the history is description of facts. What happened in the history? What incidents formed different courses of action for nations? And which incident had what impact on the society? This facet of the history is purely objective in its nature. It is a highly condemnable flagitious academic felony to garble the history in order to portray a desired picture for political or religious reasons.

Other aspect of the history is subjective. This is linking oneself to the flow of history by peeping through different ages and societies. Individuals and societies relate themselves to like-minded people in the history from antiquity to the middle ages.

For instance, a communist of any nation will relate himself to Karl Marx and even to Manichaeism in earlier history. The people who like the communist regimes of Lenin and Stalin in former Soviet Union, may not be concerned in creating a link with the Tsars of Russia. On the contrary, they may be very much interested in establishing relations with the early egalitarian societies like Essenes, Early Christians and even hunter-gatherer societies. In intellectual arena, they may feel proud of connecting themselves to the Plato's "The Republic" rather than some Russian piece of intellectual work that supports capitalism.

Similarly, a person with monastic trends may not assume a link to the history of ancient aristocrats. He may associate himself to Medieval Muslim Sufis, earlier Christian Monastic Orders, Jews of Cabbala and Hindu or Buddhist Yogis.

A provincialist or localist will associate himself with the history of his particular region. He may find some local heroes in the history to be proud of them. He will admire those poets and writers who have praised the rivers, mountains and valleys of his own area.

Visit www.mubashirnazir.org to read more articles about personality development.

The same is true with a religionist. A devout Pakistani Muslim may not be interested in associating himself to the civilization of ancient Moenjodaro. He may be more comfortable in linking himself to the staunch ancient Muslims of Arabia.

Before Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, he may feel a sense of comradeship with the earnest disciples of Prophet Jesus عليه الصلوة والسلام. Before him, he could create emotional ties to the true followers of the Prophets of Israel عليهم الصلوة والسلام. In antiquity, his heroes may be Abraham and Noah عليها الصلوة والسلام rather than some local leaders.

This subjective approach of looking at the history and developing intellectual associations with the people on the same wave length has nothing wrong in its essence. In the present age of "freedom of thinking", one has the right to establish connections in the history based on his/her orientation.

Secularists often pick holes in the approach of looking into the history as a catalyst to extremism. Extremism has nothing to do with the religion. It is a stark intellectual disorder that can capture the mind of any religionist or secularist.

It is true that religion is often used to cultivate fanaticism and zealotry to serve the political, economic or psychological interests of religious leadership but the secular extremists are not different in this case. Their leaders use some other concepts like patriotism, fascism, nationalism, racism, localism etc. to nurture the seeds of extremism in order to set the stage in favor of their interests.

Therefore, we have the undeniable and unquestionable right to look at the history and establish bonds with the like-minded people of ancient ages. Although, while doing so, we should be aware that some religious or political leader can manipulate such ties to create extremism in order to metamorphose us to his intellectual slaves.

(Author: Muhammad Mubashir Nazir)

*If you once forfeit the confidence of your fellow citizens, you can never regain their respect and esteem. It is true that you may fool all of the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all of the time; but you can't fool all of the people all of the time. **Abraham Lincoln***

Visit www.mubashirnazir.org to read more articles about personality development.

Are the Muslims victims of Civilizational Narcissism? An interesting article on our collective psychology. www.mubashirnazir.org/pd/english/PE05-1004-Narcissism.htm

Share your views. If you any question regarding personality development, send an email to mubashirnazir100@gmail.com.

Think about it!

- Why is objectivity important in study of history? Which aspect of the history is subjective?
- To whom do you relate yourself in the history?

Send your comments and questions by email to publish them on this webpage.