EVOLUTION AND TRENDS OF PROGRESSIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY IN PAKISTAN: AN ESTIMATE OF THE NAISSANT DECADES (1971-2010)

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ABSTRACT

The paper evolves the thematic assumption that historical consciousness reflected in progressive historiography in last four decades or so is primarily a reaction against the feudal fabric and outlook of the society and tends to understand the historical process and trends which paved way for the emergence of this school of historiography in the country. Progressive School of Historiography links itself with the progressive movement of mid-thirties which inspired a considerable number of scholars i.e. the leftist lot of the country. They adopted a self-motivated rather missionary approach to proliferate a historiographical ideal what is typically termed as the “other side” of History Writing. In the wake of revolutionary outburst of 1969 in the country- which claimed the first Martial Law regime, public hoped for the end of the country’s oppressive fabric forever. Although the endeavour remained fruitless yet it gave way to the realization of “social democracy” and “populism” in the country with an aim to create dialectic against the feudal as well as industrial classes of the country. The progressive historiographers were viewed as subversive to the indigenous history writing pursuits rather they were termed as hardliners both content and methodology they adopted for the promotion of their ideologies. Another phenomenon which emerges as the by-product of this dialectic was the influence of politics over the history writing which resulted into the leftist-rightist milieu. The progressive movement despite failing to produce the desired results yet the influence of the historical school of thought it produced cannot be marginalized or undermined. Hence the Progressive historiography is the logical outcome of the subaltern, alternate, anti-colonial, and post modern concepts of history and historiography destined to reshape the socio-cultural fabric of the society.

KEYWORDS

Progressive Movement, historiography, methodology, Marxism
1. PROGRESSIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY IN PAKISTAN: THE FORMATIVE PHASE

The Progressive School of Historiography in Pakistan is the direct outcome of the endeavours made by the Progressive Writers Association (PWA) Pakistan, in turn an offshoot of Anjuman Tarraqi Pasand Mussanafin-e-Hind or Progressive Writers' Movement established in pre-partition India in 1936 (Zaheer, 2006, pp.16-18). Being anti-imperialistic and left-oriented, it sought to inspire people through their writings advocating equality and attacking social injustice and backwardness. It was the strongest movement in Urdu literature and beyond after Sir Syed (1817-1898)’s Aligarh Movement (Aziz, 1959, pp.11-12).

The progressive historiography, among other sources, gains inspiration from Marxist historiography, both in content and methodology. Wherever one stands on the ideological scale, it is hard to refute the influence of Karl Marx, and his subsequent theories and doctrines, have had on the world at large. Some, like Vladimir Lenin, took Marx’s ideals and turned it into a political party and system of government, while others, like Mao Zedong, have simply used it as a foundation to further their own ideological and political ambitions. But in its truest essence, based on the writings and comments made by Marx and others, Marxism is a view of the world, offering both resources to scholars and laymen alike (Draper, 1978, pp.75-96).

To gain a true appreciation for what Marxist Historiography entails, an understanding of Karl Marx is important. He was both a philosopher and a political theorist focusing his attention on the interactions between those who owned the means of production and those who supplied the production through their labour. He was motivated not by a curiosity of industry “but by a critical awareness of its shadowy side, the industrial laborers sorrow, heartbeat, sweat, and toil” (Green & Troup, 1999, pp.33-43).

Marx was also critical of religion, believing that it was merely a construct to control the masses. Of course, his most legacy was the spread of Communism as a political ideology, but it was his contribution to historiography that offers what was, in his time, an entirely new and unique way of analyzing the past. Marx’s theory of historical materialism presented historians a methodological approach to their work, as well as shedding light and emphasizing the plight of the common man. His ideas were a different way of viewing history, this time from the bottom up, seeing the agent of change in history from a perspective of relationships between people, and not as a series of accidents. This is the fabric of Marxist Historiography which provides the very base of the progressive historiography all over the world especially in Pakistan. It is the history of “people demanding socio-cultural change with or without class dialectics” (Tucker, 2009).

Ahmad Salim, renowned progressive scholar and poet, is of the view that the recorded history, all over the world and especially in Pakistan, is not the history of the masses, it is not the history of peasants, labourers, brick-kiln workers, blacksmiths, bakers, stone-crushers, road-builders, clerks and daily-wage earners; nor, is it the history of revolutionaries, poets, musicians, painters, sculptors and intellectuals. Hence, it is neither the history of the whole mankind nor the collective flow of life (Lichtheim, 1961, p.333).

Rulers, political intelligentsia, big and small minions of government and despotic overlords created our recorded history. This is the pattern of Pakistan’s history. The text in historical narrative in Pakistan, as product and propagator of the state ideology, derives its legitimacy from a narrow set...
of directives based on a limited approach. It reflects one-sided accounts, divergent state ideologies, biased judgments and inaccuracies. In the absence of a true version of history, the historiography in Pakistan based it on biased approach. Bureaucrats, military generals and politicians presented their own version of historical narratives over the last 60 years (Gardiner, 1988). This biased approach lacked people’s perspective.

History needs to be re-written and we need to correct false information. To cover their mistakes and wrongdoings, the ruling elite produced false narratives. We need to re-write history based on people’s perspective; particularly, our literature … needs to be re-written and re-visited. In re-writing history from people ‘perspective, we must be vigilant in terms of ideology, doctrine and prejudice. Let our generations know the truth rather than to a single, officially ordained, sanitized truth (Salim, n.d., p.6).

Thus, the progressive historiography draws the following lines of action to be considered while chalking out its methodology and scope:

1. Progressive Historiography, as the methodology suggests, explains the social basis of historical knowledge at each stage of its development. It determines the social functions of historical knowledge in different epochs and how these functions were carried out, and stresses the necessity of studying historical conceptions in organic connection with the social and political life of the period in which these conceptions were developed. This aspect of research enables an interrelationship to be established between the science of history and the present. In examining this interrelationship, historiography deals with the most important source of the party-mindedness of historical knowledge and establishes the fact that the results of historical studies depend on the historian’s social views (Dr. Mubarak Al, 2008, p.25).

2. Progressive historiography studies the theoretical and methodological principles inherent in every school of historical thought, requiring the discovery of the connections between historical science and philosophy, sociology, political economy, theories of state and law, and theoretical natural science. The study of theoretical and methodological principles cannot, however, be reduced to an analysis of all the general theoretical statements of historians of a school but presupposes an analysis of the application to historical research of theoretical and methodological tenets (Blackledge, 2006, p.167).

3. Progressive historiography analyzes the source-study basis of historical work, the nature of the use of sources, and specific research methods. This aspect of the study of historiography permits elucidation of the unique characteristics of various schools’ research methods, evaluation of each school’s place in the ascertaining and systematizing of historical facts, and explanation of the interrelationship between methodology and techniques of historical research (Benedetto Croce, 1966, p.46).

4. Progressive historiography analyzes the problems of historical research and their broadening scope as the most important manifestation of the progress of historical knowledge and as the manifestation of the socioeconomic and political requirements of a given historical epoch (Breisach, 2007, p.293).
5. Progressive historiography investigates the interpretations of various schools of historical thought. Such analysis permits the tracing of the process whereby obsolete historical interpretations are overcome; it also permits explanation of the factor of continuity in the development of the science of history and the use, under new conditions, of the objectively true findings of earlier periods of the development of historical science. Thus, the disagreements of representatives of different schools over historical questions that are of immediate relevance for a given period may be more concretely depicted.

6. Progressive historiography studies the organization and practice of historical research, including scholarly institutions and archives, the training of historians, publishing, and the use and propagation of historical views (Rigby, 1997, p.895).

However, it is pertinent to note that the various aspects of historiographic research are closely interconnected. Only through a comprehensive study of historiographic material is it possible to scientifically determine both the main paths of the history of historical science and important phenomenon in the history. Such comprehensive study also enables historical knowledge to be used for working out problems that are relevant to the present study of history. The contemporary study of historiographic problems requires that the scholar must possess a high level of general historical competence, good knowledge of historical material, and a thorough mastery of progressive theory, permitting him to creatively apply the categories of dialectical and historical materialism to analysis of historiographic phenomena and processes without which a consistently scientific understanding of the history of historical science is inconceivable (G.A. Cohen, 1978).

2. Progressive Historiography in Pakistan: From Confrontation to Accommodation

The History of Progressive Historiography enters its Second Phase with the most heated event of the decade, the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case 1951, the event that quivered the already fragile foundations of the Communist Party of Pakistan as well as other pro-left endeavors in the country (Ayesha Jalal, 1990).

Dr. Tauseef Aized, a critic on the historical events, while explaining the Rawalpindi conspiracy case, maintains that There are incidents in the history of every nation which have profound future implications. In many cases, such incidents are controversial and are always a matter of debate and discussion among different sectors of a society. The Rawalpindi conspiracy case is one such unfortunate event in our post-independence history which has impacted our political and, to some extent, social history. After a lapse of six decades, the event ought now to be analysed objectively to learn useful lessons from it as the dust of emotions and sentiments has settled down … The most astonishing point of the case was the collaboration between the communist party leaders and the army officers, as both sections of the society possessed different approaches towards the society and its functioning and evolution (“Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case,” n.d.).

Though Pakistan was conceived as a secular, democratic country by its founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the feudal elements in Pakistan Muslim League started asserting themselves after the death of Jinnah in 1948 transforming the country into a protégé of US imperialism and it became increasingly difficult for the progressive and democratic forces to survive in Pakistan (“Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case,” n.d.).
The Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case forced several leftist writers to leave the country while others had to reconcile with the circumstances for the larger interest of the cause. They did not come in direct hostility with the government and decided to accommodate themselves. This change can be demarcated in the history writing too in the subsequent years. During this period many progressive writers like Sibte Hassan, Hamza Alavi, etc assumed a self-imposed responsibility to do academic research on progressive lines and a number of valuable works were produced (“Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case,” n.d.). No doubt it was the time when the foundations of progressive historiography in the country were consolidated on the strong footing.


The ban on its literary organ, the Progressive Papers Limited run by Mian Iftikhar-ud-din including the dailies Pakistan Times, Imroze and the weekly Lail-o-Nahaar on April 18, 1959, was a serious blow to the nascent progressive movement losing an effective means against the state-controlled propaganda machine (Ahmad, 1987, pp.18-23).

Along with Sibte Hassan, another London based progressive tycoon Hamza Alavi produced best piece of literature on cosmopolitan themes on the progressive lines. His thesis of ‘the salariat (salaried) class’ and the role of landlords of the Punjab and Sindh in the Pakistan movement; his theory of the ‘overdeveloped state’; his views on nationhood and nationalities in Pakistan; and the role of bureaucracy were widely appreciated and quoted by the scholars of South Asia (M. A. Khan, 1972). He very much wanted to reconstruct the history of the colonial and postcolonial periods in the subcontinent.

Hamza Alavi fervently opposed the religious, linguistic, or ethnic nationalism and propounded the theory of territorial nationalism based on the country’s geography, which he believed Pakistan needed. Later he conducted research on the origin of the ‘Pakistan ideology’ and refuted the official version that Pakistan had been created in the name of Islam. He was collecting material in support of his thesis that the Communist Party helped the Muslim League develop an organization and discipline. This gave rise to the concept of an ideology for the country which was reconstructed later as the ‘Islamic’ and then the ‘Pakistan’ ideology. He was also critical of the Indian historians who are writing colonial and post colonial history from the nationalist point of view and ignoring some of the important aspects of the history of the Muslim community (Dr. Mubarak Al, 2003).

Dr. Mubarak Ali, while commenting on Hamza Ali, asserts that in the later days of his life, Hamza Ali became interested in Punjab and its role in the freedom movement. According to him, it is important to understand the history of Punjab in order to understand the history of Pakistan. He was very critical of Ian Talbot and Gilmartin and wanted Pakistani historians to undertake research on
the role of the Unionist, Ahrar and Khaksar parties, especially on how the landlords shifted their loyalty to the Muslim League just before Independence because they were concerned at the Congress Party's programme for land reforms in the country.

Moreover, breaking with the idea that the movement for an independent Pakistan in the 1930s and 40s had been inspired solely by religious motives, Hamza Alavi contended that it had been led by the salary-dependent class of Muslim government servants, whom he dubbed the “salariat”. Having seen a diminution in its share of jobs in pre-partition India, this salariat saw that it stood to gain most from the creation of a new state. Hamza defined the Pakistan that emerged in 1947 as an “overdeveloped state”, by the overwhelming influence of its bureaucratic-military complex (Dr. Mubarak Al, 2003).


Country politics took a new turn in 1968 with an outburst of civil society was seen to overthrow the despotic Ayub regime. Especially students of colleges and universities, factory workers and peasants joined hands with one another. This was the commencement of revolution by the ‘leftists’ and ‘progressives’ (Mazhar Ali Khan, 1996, pp.265-69). This movement successfully claimed the Ayub regime but could not achieve the desired outcomes because the feudal and hegemonic fabric of the country (Iftikhar H. Malik, 1996, p.675). Dr. Lal Khan, a political activist and Trotskyite political theorist of international repute, later analyzed the outcomes of this movement as “the other side” of the story (L. Khan, n.d.). As Dr. Ahmad Arslan, a Marxist political activist and intellectual based in Multan, while commenting on Dr. Lal Khan’s work “Pakistan’s Other Story: The Revolution of 1968-69” termed it one of the most important texts to have emerged from Pakistan (Arslan, n.d.). According to him it was for the first time in Pakistan that someone put the positions of traditional left of Pakistan under a Marxist critique and has identified flawed ideology as the main reason for the failure of revolution of 1968 which resulted in emergence of Pakistan’s Peoples Party (Arslan, n.d.). He furthering his comments add that “not only this book highlights the “other side” of Pakistan; it in itself is the “other side” of History writing. Challenging the established discourse in history writing, not only the one which is termed as “bourgeois” but also the one which has long held the claim to be a pro people one. The book is not only a critique of events it is also a critique of history writing” (Arslan, n.d.).

Thus, Lal Khan provides the historiographical frame work for analysis of Pakistan Peoples Party as a phenomenon with its roots in the discontent which emerged from desire of the people to become masters of their destiny and the position of communists who analyzed the situation to be “non revolutionary”. Why this “distance” occurred between the interests of people and the Party? Lal Khan sees it in the Stalinist degeneration of Marxism, its conversion into a dogmatic nationalist ideology; the result was that the party instead of being vanguard of working class became a pawn in game of foreign policy wars between USSR, China and USA. Most of the revolutionary movements were abandoned in colonial countries to further foreign policy state interests of either USSR or China, whether it was Second World War or revolution of 1968 (Arslan, n.d.).
Dr. Arslan explains that the movement of 1968 becomes a petty bourgeois reaction of students and lumpen proletarians with only cultural implications, i.e. development of counter culture, rock and pop music and liberty of thought. In Pakistan, it is explained as labour unrest and part of United States agenda against Ayub Khan and China (Arslan, n.d.).

He also maintains that Lal Khan skillfully studied party struggle vis-à-vis class struggle and views that while Marx and Marxist historiography have always understood class struggle to be the motor of history, later the position was put forward that because party is vanguard of working class, its positions represents the “correct class position” hence Marxist historiography became an attempt to historically justify various positions of communist Parties instead of documenting the class struggle. The result was this kind of history writing against which Lal Khan’s emerges as a Marxist critique. With this Lal Khan’s methodology appears closer to Subaltern Historians who developed under the traditional communist historians but who have put their histories under critique for ignoring the struggles of the “others” the peasants, students, Dalits, Women, Gender non-conformists in developing an essentially pro people critique of upper classes as well as traditional progressives who were insensitive to natives and “others” (Arslan, n.d.).

3. EFFORTS FOR CONSOLIDATION OF PROGRESSIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY IN PAKISTAN: AN ESTIMATE OF DR. MUBARAK ALI AND AHMAD SALEEM

In 1970s among many names, two icons Dr. Mubarak Ali and Ahmad Salim assumed the responsibility to take the lead of progressive history compilation amidst the high confusion about the future of this fragile school of thought. Dr Mubarak Ali, intellectual and historian of international repute, focused his energies to rewrite medieval and colonial history of India and produced around fifty books on mainly historical themes. His work is commendable on at least four grounds. First, he took to himself the task of bringing history to the common man and impressing on him the relevance of this discipline to an understanding of contemporary times. He put him at stake by taking to write popular history. His work could be looked down upon by those professional historians who wrote for a selective readership directly involved with the discipline. Notwithstanding that his books were for commoners, over the years they increasingly won wide acclaim.

Secondly, by writing on themes other than political history and by bringing under the spotlight of historical inquiry subjects like society, culture, architecture, beliefs, attitudes, etc, Dr. Mubarak Ali demonstrated how wide and multifaceted the discipline of history had become. He wrote on diverse subjects such as the history of personal lives, eating habits, low-castes, slavery, dacoits, racism, cities, and war and peace, apart from political history of the Mughals and other Indian dynasties.

Thirdly, Dr Mubarak Ali came up with a strong critique of the official historiography of our country raising fundamental questions challenging the authenticity of its underlying assumptions. He holds that once moulded to fit in the ideological straitjacket of the state, history loses its objectivity and its relevance for human and social development.

Fourthly, Dr. Mubarak Ali took his discipline and its projection and popularization as a mission. In doing so he has been compelled to repeat his message which is understandable given the activist nature of his mission (Dr. Mubarak Ali, 2008).
Dr. Ahmad Salim, on the other hand, is known for his variety and versatility of work. During 1969-71 he was associated with National Awami Party (NAP) and was briefly put in jail in 1971 for his criticism of Pakistan Army's operation in East Pakistan. In 1972 Z. A. Bhutto appointed Faiz as the Chairman of National Council of Arts. Ahmad Salim joined the Council on Faiz’s invitation. During his association with the National Council of Arts from 1972 through 1975, Ahmad Salim operated the Folklore Research Centre and published material on Punjabi and Sindhi folklore. Ahmad Salim left the Council shortly after Faiz left that institution in 1974. His interest in Pakistani languages forced him to join Sindh University Jamshoro where he not only taught different languages but also translated Shah Hussain’s poetry into Sindhi, and Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai’s work into Punjabi.

One of his close associates, Shafqat Kakakhel, former ambassador and advisor at Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), while delineating Ahmad Salim’s literary endeavours summed up that Salim had a masterly command over intellectual, economic, social, political, historical and literary subjects and he was not an individual but an institution that has produced over 200 hundred books’ he went on saying. His work is not only historic and literary but also full of courage and bravery. He is a rebellion who has paid price for his rebellious intellectual work in the form of imprisonment, lashing, scarifies, and hardships but he has led a life full of courage and dignity (“Salim Ahmad,” n.d.).

Dr. Tariq Rahman of Quaid-i-Azam University, described him as a person with complete dedication to research and publications. Terming him as ‘liberal humanist’ and his work ‘extremely rare’ in literature, sustainable development, women and human rights, rights of oppressed, and history, he held that Salim had worked not only with passion and dedication but with physical and moral courage who stood against oppression and opposed military operations in East Pakistan and Balochistan. He felicitated him for his extensive and one of the largest archives in Pakistan, build over a period of 50 years with collection of rare books from all around the world, especially on the struggle of leftist movement in Pakistan and beyond. He lauded him for building and maintaining this archive single-handedly.

One can safely conclude that Salim’s endeavours in conserving the archival progressive history have laid the foundation stone for the better future for the progressive historiography in the country.

4. PROSPECTS OF PROGRESSIVE HISTORIOGRAPHY IN PAKISTAN: AN ESTIMATE

Progressives generally work for the transformation of at political-based government into a people-based government. Moreover, they look to the government to help with the social and economic needs. They resort to the government to take control of the social and economic problems of industrialization. Their main objective is to establish a system of government that puts the nation under control. Generally comprising mostly middle-class of the society, the progressives feel pressure from the lower and upper classes. Middle-class people throw their stones, but cannot hit hard enough to knock the upper classes down. So, they try to find a strong political leader thriving for such a government system with a dogma that the middle-class stones cannot make much of a dent, but the rocks of the government can (Arslan, n.d.). The Marxism, even though how controversial and terrestrial it is, comes forth with dogma of progressives’ Paradise Lost and they
obtain the whole inspiration from it and mould their ideas as the space and times aspire to. Marxism is both the idea and legacy for the progressives. While it must be kept in mind while adhering to any of the dogma or belief that legacies – secular or theological – need to be looked and studied critically to see what went right or what went wrong during the time those people associated with the legacies were doing what they have become famous or infamous for. Hence the historical process must be understood in continuum otherwise the historical consciousness is likely to be damaged. Thus; the progressive historiography requires from the progressive historians and other ardent followers that:

1. As far as the progressive beliefs which have given birth to the progressive philosophy and historiography must be seen in relation with the soil to which they are meant for. They vary from place to place and culture to culture. Same as the question of identity today cannot be related to religion but to the soil (Aitzaz Ahsan, 1996).

2. Secularism, as one of the tenets of progressivism, has wrongly been interpreted vis-à-vis the social milieu of the country, hence it is the prime duty of the progressive historians to alienate secularism from the infamous interpretation as ‘faithlessness’ and vice versa (Ahmad, 1987, pp.89-96).

3. In order to manipulate progressive historiography with its all-embracing nature its subject matter can be reevaluated in the light of divine guidance as Altaf Javed and other scholars are striving hard to bridge the gulf between socialism and religion. Hence there can be a debate between “Marx on Religion” and “Marx and Religion” (Javed, 1992).

4. Progressive Historiographers should pay attention to the ignored areas of the country’s history including the extra-judicial killings in the East Pakistan during 1952 and 1971, role of minorities in the country’s development, regional histories in terms of culture, gender and socio-economic norms, etc.

5. Work of the progressive writers and historians should be reappraised to establish the discipline on solid grounds.

6. Progressive Historiography as an academic discipline has been ignored; it is not being taught even in a single institute in the country especially in public sector organizations. Progressive historiographers are required to effort hard to inculcate it as an academic discipline.

3. CONCLUSION

The influence of Marxist Historiography is irrefutable, whether one agrees with the political and radical aspects of Marx’s overall beliefs. However, Marx’s reputation was ruined with the advent of Marxist-Leninism and the political and economic problems that Communist nations faced. If the overthrow of Capitalism never occurred in practice, coupled with the absolute failing of Communist governments, the entirety of Marx’s beliefs should be called into question. But this is not the case and the acceptance of Marx’s historical claims entails no commitment to his revolutionary politics. From either view, whether radical or revolutionary, whether pragmatic or impractical, Karl Marx’s theory of history is long-lasting and far-reaching. He has not only influenced future historians, but offered analytical tools and definitions that aid in the study of history today. Hence the progressive historiography must be established as an academic discipline.
and should be proliferated accordingly. In Pakistan, this discipline is at its initial stages; nonetheless, with the continuous strife it can be consolidated on the strong footing. In the past the historians like Sibte Hassan, Hamza Alavi, Ahmad Salim, Dr. Mubarak Ali, and scholars like Ahmad Ali, Lal Khan, and Aitzaz Ahsan have borne the responsibility of establishing historiography on progressive footing. These efforts should be equally consolidated by the ardent followers of the discipline through dedication and hard work. At present, hundreds of blogs and websites are functioning to propagate the progressive ideas; these efforts must be collaborated to further the progressive historiography as an academic discipline.

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