



Research Article



Mubarak Ali's Contributions in Historiography Trends in Pakistan

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Abstract

History writing has always been a tough challenge in Pakistan. It is difficult to understand the real picture of history because the history of past events, stories and issues is not stored in its actual form. Historians are trying to provide new interpretations for the already used source materials and also use previously unused sources. In present scenario, history subject is not based on old stories, political events, and famous personalities of the countries. Role of the scholars, the thinkers, and professional experts was very significant in past but unfortunately, we don't have people like them in present who can give the new ideas to overcome these crises. At present some role was played by Dr. Mubarak Ali. He introduced the new approach of history writing. This paper is designed to ornate the contribution of Dr. Mubarak Ali in historiography in Pakistan exploring the new trends of history and to give a critical analysis of his works. The nature of the research is descriptive.

Key Words

Historiography Trends, Pakistan, History, Dr. Mubarak Ali

Introduction

Mubarak Ali is a prominent historian, activist and scholar of Pakistan. He was born in *Tonk*, British India in April 1941. Ali did his M.A. in History from Sindh University, Jamshoro in 1963. In 1972, he went to London and then to Germany for higher studies and attained a PhD degree (the Mughal Period of India) at Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany in 1976. Later, he became head of the History Department at the University of Sindh. He was the Director of the Goethe Institute in Lahore until 1996. He is also the editor of the quarterly journal *Tarikh* (History). His ideas about history writing played a vital role in the modern history and provided the new platform to historians of Pakistan.

Mubarak Ali had such a great effect on the other historians. His works were converted into a type of movement in which young writers from different parts of the country took part. His works gave courage and a sense of direction to the young ones. He believed that Historiography has undergone great model change due to the recent developments in historical understanding. Historians are trying to provide new interpretations for the already used source materials and also use previously unused sources. To a certain extent, these new methods of experiments in historical understanding and writing are necessitated by the intellectual interventions of Post-

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modernism. There are many problems of historiography in Pakistan but the tragedy is that the subject of history has lost its importance in our country. The problems of Pakistan's historiography are that its four provinces are historically and culturally older. They have their own history, culture, language, and their territorial identity, so how can national history and regional history be brought together so that the two identities can go hand in hand.

After the creation of Pakistan, all the literature based on ideology of Pakistan, military ruler, dictatorship, favorite personalities, which is done by the different historian and writers of Pakistan. The history of Pakistan could be based on dictatorship or democracy the two different political systems which Pakistan experienced like many other newly-independent states with the aim of bringing progress and prosperity to the country. But historians tend to focus their attention only on the activities of the so called leaders who by plundering the country have damaged it beyond repair. There is need to bring the light the contribution of the common people who struggled despite adversities. In Pakistan different historians played their role to explore new trends of history writings. To some extent Dr. Mubarak Ali, Dr. Ayesha Jalal, I H Qurashi (1903–1981), S M Iqbal (1908–1971), Khan Roshan Khan (1914 to 1988), Rehmat Faruqhabadi (1942–1991), Sulaiman Nadvi (1884 to 1951), Nabi Bakhsh Baloch (1917 to 2011), Hasam ud Din Rashdi (1911–1982), Ghulam Rasool Maher (1893 –1971), [K.K Aziz \(1927 –2009\)](#), are the historians of Pakistan. Some of them are perceived as a nationalist and some of them tried to highlight the importance of history writing. However, towards the end of his writing career, Aziz reversed this trend and tried to counter the stereotypes that Pakistani historians have sifted through. His study, *The Assassination of History*, was a trend master who inspired many to question the mechanism and motives of Pakistan's history as a whole. Dr. Mubarak Ali one of them who is performing service to restore to exact meaning of history writing and also give importance to local people history approach instead of elite approach.

The issues of historiography also came under discussion in *Tarikh: Tehqiq kay Na'ay Rujhanat* ([M. Ali, Tarikh: Tehqiq kay Na'ay Rujhanat 2004](#)) (New Trends of Research in History), in which Ali especially traced the long journey of Bengali self-assertion. He showed how Bengali identity asserted itself in different contexts, first, during colonialism, then during the period when East Bengal was a part of Pakistan, thereafter, amidst the rise of Bengali separatist movement, and finally, following independence of Bangladesh. The upshot of his argument is that the nationalist claims are not permanent and inflexible, rather they emerge and change in particular contexts responding to the nature of the conflict they are part of. The historians also shift their positions accordingly. At one point Mubarak Ali tried to discuss the importance of *Dar-ul-Aloom Mudrasah e Deoband* and role of Sufi's in subcontinent.

“A revolutionary change in religious Ulama's behavior was observed at the ending time of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century. The scholars pointed out the importance of unity at this stage, and advised the Muslims community to act as a unit. Their aim was to unite the Muslim community. One purpose of these trends was to finish sectarian conflicts.” ([M. Ali, Tarikh: Tehqiq kay Na'ay Rujhanat 2004](#))

According to Dr Naazir Mahmood Writing about the problems of historiography in Pakistan, Dr Mubarak Ali has pointed out that we are obsessed with the role of personalities, the Two-Nation theory, and religious feelings. He recommends that now we change this framework and write history with new contours.

The book *“The Murder of History”* by K.K Aziz is one of the few and rare historians that Pakistan has produced and his scholarship and literary acumen must not be judged by this book. This book stands up to its promise, i.e., showing Pakistani students and parents what rubbish

they are being taught on the name of History; however, it is not meant for the serious well informed reader. He claims that Pakistan was created by the Hindus under the persistent nagging of the Muslims of India for greater rights. K. K. Aziz appeared to be rather lonely occurrences, one person who constantly wrote on this theme for years, in the form of books, newspaper columns, and research articles was none else but Mubarak Ali. In fact, writing on the trends of historiography has had fascination more of his time than any other area of history. His books on this theme number at least twenty, which shows the importance to it. An earlier work was *Tarikh our Roshni* (M. Ali, [Tarikh aur Roshni 1986](#))(History and Light), in which first he graphed various philosophies of history, like materialistic, Marxist, secular, divine, and other ideas of history. Then he proceeded to history-writing in Pakistan, which he defined as calamity for he thinks that people were kept in the dark about the truth regarding various happenings of the past. (M. Ali, [Tarikh aur Roshni 1986](#))

Another approach is to document the history of evolution of colonial institutions like *jagirdari*, bureaucracy and the army of Pakistan. Those institutions served the colonial hegemony and forced people to submit to the ruling authorities. There is need to analyze if these institutions still force people's will or follow the will of people. Other institutions which monopolized politics and are associated with the ruling class are feudalism, tribal system and *gaddi nasheen*. These have also discouraged people from participating in politics.

In the background of Pakistan, one thematic book of Mubarak Ali that enjoyed unquestionable importance and is equally well-received by the readers, has been *Jagirdari* (Feudalism). The book investigated the nature of European feudalism as well as its Indian counterpart that has kept sociologists involved for a long time in trying to classify it. Mubarak Ali talked on feudalism a lot in his book and other articles. We can understand the several meanings of feudalism by having a look on these words of Mubarak Ali:

While the feudal system dominates our politics, culture and society, we still live in medieval times. Time and again, the French peasants revolted against these injustices, but the rebellions were crushed because the peasants did not have weapons and military training to fight against the professional and well-equipped army. Louis XIV, the most powerful ruler of France who succeeded to the throne in 1638 weakened the power of the feudal lords by asking them to live at the court of Versailles, where he kept an eye on them and reduced their influence on their estates. At Versailles, they had to spend a lot of money to maintain their high standard of living. Instead of opting for lesser luxury, they began to extract more money from the peasants who remained in perpetual debt. (M. Ali, Article, 2014)

Badalti Hui Tarikh (M. Ali, [Badalti hoi Tarikh 1997](#)) (Changing History) highlights the different types of people and their history. This book is also divided in many parts. In first session, he discussed the Famous Novel writer *Tolstoy*. History of Novel writing is most important in the life of the people. He also discussed *Tolstoy* Novel that was written on war and peace situation and their facts and figures. In addition, he highlighted the new ideas about History writing. The most important of these are "personalities" that played a very important role in history writing. Every personality is a historian himself. So, that is why history always relates to these personalities. In start, these personalities were *Wazeers*, Kings and then poets, religious scholars and *Ulma* took part. But in apposite ideology, some historians of 18th century gave the arguments that the great nations of the world especially European nation's important aim was equality, freedom and the fellowship of European Civilization. *Tolstoy* refused all these ideologies and said that the circle of history is not in short, its scholars' responsibilities. They just use history as an aim and highlight deeply its every objective." (M. Ali, [Badalti hoi Tarikh 1997](#))

He discussed the importance of history of public. He focused his attention on a very important point that history is not just a part of political incident or some important personalities. Social, economic and cultural aspects are also very important parts of history. He also introduced the Subaltern Study approach that introduced Hindustan writers and gave suggestion that we must write history of those common people who were ignored in the society. He also highlighted the hidden features of the history. Thus, this subaltern study approach was applied in Pakistan as well, where nothing was written in public history. Pakistani Scholars responded negatively to this type of history writing in the country. Mubarak Ali gave an example of *Nighat Saeed Khan's* interview. She interviewed some people of Punjab province. Most of them didn't know about Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1948), Muslim League and Lahore Resolution. According to them, Pakistan movement was just a religious controversy that aimed the killing of the people and migration of the people from one place to another place. They did not know about Two Nation Theory, dream of Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1930) and 14 points of Quaid-I-Azam (1929). ([M. Ali, Badalti hoi Tarikh 1997](#))

Historiography of different things continued to be surveyed in *Tarikh aur Siyasat* (Mubarak 1997) (History and Politics). In this book, he highlighted the hidden features of the politics and also defined the word 'politics' and explained its origin. He also discussed two aspects of politics. The negative aspect of politics is its relation to government and its system, and not with local people. It's totally belonging to elite class. So the interference of the people in the politics can be considered as a big crime because the image of politics is always pictured as 'all the matter of politics belongs to the government and people of elite class who are directly or indirectly supporting government'. Another example is the event of the Indian National Congress. It was established in 1885, in the subcontinent and the Muslims participated in Politics. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan showed a huge response and criticized this action. He advised them to stay away from politics.

A section of his book consists of arguments about colonialism and imperialism in detail. Another section is about changes and revolutions; including Chinese revolution, French revolution and Russian revolution. Colonialism came under conversation with its wider aspects in *Tarikh Kiya Kehti Hai?* (Mubarak Ali 1998) (What does History Say?). The context here is India, its pre-colonial and post-colonial societies and the Freedom movement. Mubarak Ali discussed the role of East India Company and the rise of East India Company and how India was captured by the British. Surveying the pre-colonial social formation of India, he discussed the thesis of Oriental Dictatorship, as presented by Kar Witfogel.

The search for historiography of different things is also found in *History on Trial.* ([Ali M. , History on Trial, 1999](#)). Separate chapters have been devoted to the history of rumors, tears, mission of titles, etc. There are discussions about Akbar's reforms in Pakistan, Akbar in Pakistani text books, the conquerors, the concept of noble family, the politics of hatred, etc. *Tarikh Aur Tehqiq* ([M. Ali, Tarikh aur Tehqiq 2002](#)) (History and Research) explored history of irrigation and culture of flowers. The major part of the book, however, deals with medieval Indian history, their people and way of living and impact of colonialism on India. The history of different flowers and their uses are very prevalent part of this book. *Tarikh ki Awaz* ([M. Ali, Tarikh ki Awaz 2009](#)) (The Voice of History) sheds light on the history of lifestyle, art, the concept of millennium, the idea of civilized and uncivilized, crimes in the name of civilization, etc. Why do people in power write autobiographies in cultures where historians (like Pakistan) are dead? This is because they want to cover their tracks of incompetency and ineptitude. Thus, no one can challenge their historical views in a history less culture. Pakistan is an ideological state; therefore, every Pakistani must subscribe to this ideology. In an ideological state, creativity

and any new ideology is rejected. The citizens either live in Pakistan with compromises or they have to leave it, if they cannot.

Learning from the History (D. Ali 2004) gives the lots of information about history writing. In this book Mubarak Ali covered all the aspects of life and tried to search the answer through history. He also pointed out some important question and tried to give answers of these question. Moreover, there is a need to understand new concept of history. The teaching of history that Dr. Mubarak Ali has been advocating in his illuminating little books for the last many years is a direct way to understand the new concept.

Tarikh kay Badaltay Nazriyat (M. Ali, *Tarikh kay Badaltay Nazariyat* 1997) (The Changing Theories of History) brought under discussion the various other subjects. These subjects include: human nature, supernatural forces, animals, minorities, migration, war, rise and fall of nations, labor, etc. A section of the book also highlighted how certain ideas developed in history. These included nationalism, secularism, resistance literature, enlightenment, etc.

The book *In the Shadow of History* (M. Ali, *In the Shadow of History* 1993) is a collection of articles which were published in different newspapers from time to time. In this book, *In the Shadow of History*, Mubarak Ali discussed the issues of the interpretation of history under the dictatorship. The role of dictatorship is very important in Pakistan due to several periods. In one point, he tried to highlight the dictatorship in Pakistan.

"The discipline of history is used to justify the legitimacy of the regime and to misinform and brainwash the people. The subject specially faces immense problems in those countries where the dictators replace each other within a short span of time. While in power, these dictators commission the rewriting of history according to their policies. After their death or removal from power, the new regime changes the whole version of history and commands the historians to reconstruct the past with new interpretation and if necessary, condemn the removed dictator."(M. Ali, *In the Shadow of History* 1993)

Tarikh ki Talash (M. Ali, *Tarikh ki Talash* 2003) (Search of History), this book was the translation of those English articles which were presented in different conferences. He also published this book in English. In this book he highlighted the role of 'beggar' in society. He pointed out the hidden features of *Mughal* Empire especially Akbar's era. Akbar's reforms in India, especially for common people are discussed in detail. Moreover, there is a comparative analysis on the *Mughal* rule in India.

Nationalism and nationalist historiography again came under scrutiny in *Tarikh Aur Aaj ki Dunya* (M. Ali, *Tarikh aur Aaj ki Dunya* 2005) (History and Today's World). He discussed the eight articles; Nationalism, Colonial ideologies and their bases, Imperialism and civilization, Hero ship and societies, and the History subject in Pakistan are very famous articles. He focused the invention of print media and its role. By quoting the example of the *Benedict Anderson*, he highlighted the importance of invention of print media. According to him, before the invention of print media, there were no values among nations because people of different nations and their communities had no opportunities to interact with each other. Print media became the cause of great revelation in Europe. In 1500, about two million books were published. At that time its total population was 10 million. They were focused on regional languages. Print media promoted the written literature and provided the facilities to the people who used to speak different languages.

With special reference to its treatment in Pakistan Studies, *Gumshuda Tarikh* (M. Ali, *Gumshuda Tarikh* 2005), this piece of Mubarak Ali earned a great name. It focuses the

reader's attention on how historians have periodized history. We must see the both sides of the sectarian viewpoints, obviously different from each other but having the commitment expressed. When the employee of East India Company *James Mill* wrote book "*History of British India*" he declared that this era was the Muslim era. It had Muslim rulers, although the government was neither Islamic nor religious in any way.

The debates on historiography as depicted in the books referred above, find a good convergence in *Tarikh our Nisabi Kutub* ([M. Ali, Tarikh aur Nisabi Kutub 2003](#))(History and Curricula Books), which specifically dealt with how history-writing has been undertaken by the planners of educational curricula in different parts of the world. Here, Mubarak Ali covered the syllabi taught in America, Japan, Israel, and Yugoslavia, apart from Pakistan and India. The conflict of diverse forces within the country is also reflected in their perceived vision of history and historiography. For example, in India, the governments of Indian National Congress and BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), whenever they succeed in coming to office, they try to influence history-writing according to their perceived ideologies.

In his book, *Tarikh kay Na'ay Zaway* ([M. Ali, Tarikh kay Naay Zaway 2009](#))(New Dimensions of History), Mubarak Ali devoted at least seven chapters on different aspects of the War and also discussed the relevance of the study of it in our times. In one of his articles he tried to elaborate the importance of Oral History and said that:

"Historiography formed on the third version of the oral tradition. When people are out of the traditional, political and spiritual history, they build the foundation of their imagination and desires. Some students of *Jawaharlal Nehru University* had an experience to interview the people of villages around Delhi and asked questions about *Mohammad Ghauri* and his victory against *Prithviraj Chauhan*. The answer was that *Mohammad Ghori* was the son of a person that was kidnapped by *Turkish People* and he was brought up there and after that he became king and returned back to his homeland. In this sense, it is not shameful thing that the kidnapped boy was back in his homeland as king." ([M. Ali, Tarikh kay Naay Zaway 2009](#))

An interesting and equally important book is on the history of food and the etiquettes of eating. *Tarikh: Khana our Khanay kay Adaab* ([Ali M. , Tarikh: Khana aur Khanay kay Adaab, 1995](#)) (History: Food and Etiquettes of Eating) begins with Mubarak Ali's justification of moving into this direction. He says that after his interest in political and intellectual history, he is now getting more and more interested in social and cultural history, but in a way this latter type of history is also a part of human intellect. As human intellect develops, his tastes also change; the choice of food and the eating habits also reflect upon the human society and the changing nature of people's mentality. Mubarak Ali gives the following reference.

"*Pattern of eating food shows a clear picture of values and morals of a family. It depicts the strength of connection among their members. We eat and sit together to strengthen our relations in order to fulfill our role as a family member*" (Caneti, 1984)

In his more recent writings, Dr. Mubarak Ali has been concerned with putting the Subcontinent's fight for independence in a proper potential, defining workable attitude towards the west and systematic knowledge, and the teaching of what is called history or 'Pakistan Studies' in Pakistan's educational institutions. For him, writing and teaching of history cannot be separated from the tempting march of human society towards a more equitable order. He does not hide his own vision of man's destiny and social order. He wanted to see all individual, men and women to breathe in a society that would be free from oppression and want. ([D. M. Ali 2004](#))

Niji Zindagi ki Tarikh (The History of Private Life) begins with a discussion of the importance of focusing private life as a tool of understanding the norms of a society. Here, the author draws his arguments and observations from both the Europeans and Indian societies. He also brings in the gender question and the issues of the scope of public and private spaces. The book carries separate chapters on Roman civilization. He explained the Roman family and their children.

“Their trend was that they only had children so that they can grow up and inherit the property of the family. This was the way to see and analyze the bringing up of children. If they had the capacity to look after their family heritage properly, they were considered worthy otherwise it was considered that raising them was not worth it. They could even get rid of them. (M. Ali, Niji Zindagi ki Tarikh 1996)

Tarikh our Aurat (M. Ali, *Tarikh aur Aurat 1996*) (History and Woman) was another work of Mubarak Ali. The book which has gone into numerous editions showing its acceptance by a large readership begins with the place of women in history and in the evolution of civilization. Then he moves on to the discussion of different phases of women history and how they were treated in different societies. It was analyzed through careful study that how the historians recorded, or for that matter, forgot to record, their role. He devoted a full chapter to the treatment of women by church, another one, on how the Sufis responded to their place in society, and, still another, on what change in her status took place after the Industrial Revolution.

Tehzeeb ki Kahani is a history of civilization written by Dr. Mubarak Ali. The book is in Urdu and comprised many pictures explaining the different phases of civilizational improvement. The history started from early Stone Age and ends up at Iron Age. The book answered many questions. For example, why do men and women wear clothes? When did men started to promote and why? How has fire changed the framework of human life? Why the Indus civilization did meet downfall? The book also covered the rise and fall of Roman civilization. The ancient city of Mesopotamia is also visited by the author. The architecture and the administrative division in this ancient world allowed human to survive all along the ages.

Conclusion

At the end of the research, the result is that the history, as one of the vital branches of social sciences plays an important role in creating social and political awareness among people. With the passage of time, it has enlarged its scope and now it deals with nearly every aspect of human life. Therefore, study of history is considered significant to understand the changing situation of the world. It is the task of social sciences to point out the political, social and cultural problems and find out their solution. An important fact about Mubarak Ali's work is his bravery to question the deficiencies of the existing history writing tradition in Pakistan. This has often involved him in rising issues with the official narratives. He strongly believed in not having a single version to be broadcast through official means. He stood for independent research and critical investigation. This ultimately brought multiple narratives which may not be objected in a democratic atmosphere but had mostly been missing in Pakistan. Mubarak Ali's efforts in this direction were beset with challenges and trials. But, looking back at what he had been able to do in the last over three decades, one can safely say that his works were not useless efforts. One other important thing that drew attention to Dr. Mubarak Ali was his uncompromising observance to the principles of historiography. The writer should not initially allow any subjective factors; religious, ethnic, political, or social to interfere with his assessment of history. It is clear that we can't change history, but we can rewrite history. A good opening would be to give respect to the leaders of other countries and not derogate

them to the level of gangsters and thugs unnecessarily. It would be better to make history a source of human network, not hatred.

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