

# Book Review: Partitioned Histories: The Other Side of Your Story

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*Partitioned Histories: The Other Side of Your Story* places Indian and Pakistani history textbook narratives side-by-side to highlight the contrast between them, and to point to areas of convergence. **Laraib Niaz** finds the book accessible, although occasionally over simplistic and writes that it provides a valuable one-of-a-kind platform to analyse past events and encourage the reader to consider the significance of objectivity in history writing.

**Partitioned Histories: The Other Side of Your Story.** Sidra Zia, Taymiya Zaman, Sana Anwar, Noorzadeh Raja, Joyeeta Dey (eds.) The History Project. 2016.

Find this book: [The History Project](#).

History is too often written by a particular group of people who fall prey to the option of choosing a single narrow category of interpretation. Nietzsche's statement 'There are no facts, only interpretations' is particularly applicable in the case of teaching of history in schools. Biases in historical description, inference and interpretation may occur accidentally or due to the work of pseudo-historians driven by politico-ideological motives. The depiction of history in textbooks can greatly shape perceptions regarding history and help engender socio-politico-cultural prejudices and consequently bigotry.

Keeping these notions in mind, two Pakistani graduates, Qasim Aslam and LSE alumnus Ayyaz Ahmed along with a diverse group of volunteer researchers from Pakistan, India, the US & UK founded [The History Project](#), which aims to highlight competing narratives of history, promote a holistic understanding of the world and foster critical thinking.

Their first publication, *Partitioned Histories: the Other Side of Your Story* draws from textbooks published by the Punjab textbook board, Pakistan and those published by the textbook board in Maharashtra, India to compare and contrast how the shared history of both countries has been chronicled by historians and is being relayed to students. The book contains sixteen chapters, analysing events between 1857 and the partition in 1947, providing two different versions for each chapter, one for Pakistan and one for India.

This book aims to provide a juxtaposition of two different narratives regarding the partition of India, without pointing fingers at any one side or taking a definitive stance. It allows the reader to critically analyse the subjectivity of history and to distinguish as well as analogise competing versions of the same historical events. It is also an attempt to make people realise that there may exist competing narratives as singular narratives lead to individuals judging any perspective that is not aligned with their own worldview.

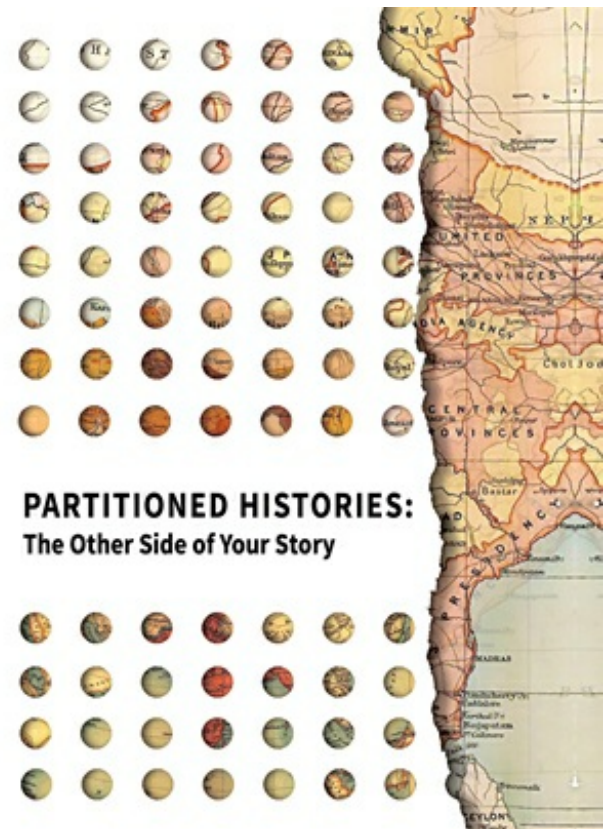




Image: Leaders accept the plan for the transfer of power, 3 June 1947. Credit: [Saktishree DM](#) CC BY-ND 2.0

Identity building stems from our understanding of culture and history, and if our very understanding is subject to bias, we are left with a convoluted sense of who we are. Post-colonial states often face complications, whilst trying to integrate the inherent culture's heritage with the changes made by the colonisers themselves. The efforts to preserve their identity can often lead to the onset of historical revisionism. Textbooks in both India and Pakistan have been criticised for their selective interpretation of historical events, greatly emphasising the rivalry between the two regions. This sort of 'indoctrination' sows the seeds of hatred in the minds of citizens of each country and opens the door to further antagonism.

*Partitioned Histories* poses some major questions regarding how both nations' history is depicted in textbooks and how the present and future generations are going to learn about it, which in turn is going to shape their worldviews.

The chapter on partition of Bengal particularly highlights the diverging views of both countries. The Pakistani interpretation describes the Hindu reaction as a refusal on their part to accept any initiatives that would benefit Muslims and describes the Hindu protests as 'violent'. On the contrary, the Indian version calls the partition an attempt by the British to 'divide and rule' and claims that it was Bengalis themselves who were against the partition and hence were the ones taking part in the protests. There is no mention of any sort of violence, and only the boycotting of goods in protest.

Perhaps one of the most interesting chapters was on Congress rule between 1937 and 1939, where the Pakistani interpretation focused on the invasive measures adopted by Congress to suppress Muslims and the various atrocities undertaken against them, while failing to include information about any positive developments during the time. Alternatively, the Indian version lauded the Congress rule and its progressive policies while failing to mention any of the ways – positive or negative – that it impacted the Muslim community.

The two countries have also reported the issue of Kashmir, which remains a point of contention to date, differently: each side develops a narrative which reinforces their own claim to the disputed territory. The Pakistani version comments on how the Maharaja of Kashmir Hari Singh began forcibly expelling Muslim Kashmiris from the territory at the time of independence, and his overthrow by Kashmiris (ex-soldiers) themselves as a result. The Indian version describes it as an armed insurgency by Pakistanis who attacked Kashmir, which prompted Hari Singh to sign the instrument of accession.

The authors make use of pictorial representations, and accessible text to accomplish their purpose. Both the Pakistani and Indian versions strictly summarise history as told in the textbooks without any personal interpretation

of the writers involved. This encourages readers to form their own viewpoint, and enhances their ability to contrast different narratives. This unprecedented approach to explaining history provides a one of a kind platform to analyse past events and makes history more objective. One addition that would be useful is a summary of points of convergence and divergence. This would have been helpful to have at the end of every chapter to make it easier for the reader to form a viewpoint.

Although it is deliberate, one does feel the lack of the authors' voice, which fails to emerge after reading the book. The intention of the history project in terms of avoiding biases and letting individuals form their own opinions is understandable, but some sort of analysis of counter narratives would have been beneficial as it is difficult for the reader to form an understanding of historical events from the book, and make a judgement on how accurate the textbooks are in relation to the evidence that is available. Furthermore, the book, as mentioned earlier, is easily understandable however it appears too simplistic at times. In many important chapters, the readers are left wanting more detail of events or the specific context behind these events such as the [Round Table conferences](#) and Congress rule.

Despite these minor weaknesses, the book itself is certainly worth reading as it is the first work of history that presents competing textbook narratives side by side. This is especially useful for the case of India and Pakistan, where generations have been instigated against each other and the intensity of dissention is still unrivalled. The book also advocates a valuable point that individuals should be encouraged to develop the skills of historical enquiry, amalgamate materials from different sources and be able and willing to challenge pre-conceived notions.

*Read more about The History Project and how it is working with school children to promote critical thinking [here](#).*

*This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the South Asia @ LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.*

### **About the Author**

**Laraib Niaz** completed her Masters in Development Management at LSE in 2015. She now works as a Research Associate for the Graduate Institute of Development Studies in Lahore.



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