

Who Curates the Nation? Museums and the Politics of Memory in Pakistan

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Abstract

Generally, museums are seen as a simple collection of objects, but they are not. They constitute the national memory. The research discusses the museums in Pakistan. It explores their structuring and presentation of collective memory, its connection with the formation of the nation, and cultural rules. According to the reflections of Anderson, Nora, and Bennett, the study considers museums as places where individuals are informed and where images of national identity are exhibited. The method of the study is qualitative. When visiting archives, read stories about the exhibitions, and visit the great national museums. Archival research and structured observational visits were conducted between 2022 and 2024. This visit taught how the government regulations, bureaucratic culture, and cultural policies influence the choices made by curators and the manner in which history is presented. The results reveal that in Pakistan, museums tend to exhibit some themes, e.g., ethnic diversity, gender histories, politics, and national security. They create the sense of collective identity not merely by maintaining neutrality but by making a choice. Another significant disconnect in the museum studies in Pakistan has also been noted in the article in the work of Nadeem Omar Tarar, particularly in his analysis of museums and the politics of representation in Pakistan. His work underscores the lack of interdisciplinarity. Training, professional curatorial model, and methods of engaging the people in the interpretation of the heritage. This article ends by suggesting a more dialogical and open-minded attitude towards museology. This would promote interdisciplinary collaboration, ethical curating, broadening community engagement, and making the application of digital tools more accessible. The article contributes to the existing debate regarding the role of cultural institutions in the formation of historical knowledge in South Asia by introducing Pakistani museums in the broader discussion of memory, heritage, and nation-building.

Keywords: Museums, interdisciplinary, curators, historical, ethical curating.

Introduction

Museums are described as locations that preserve the past and preserve old items, as well as safeguard the culture. Recent research indicates that they are not merely neutral repositories of artifacts. They are sites where the nations narrate their stories, where the history is arranged, and where the collective memory is transformed into learning exhibitions. According to Benedict Anderson,

nations are imagined communities comprising common stories, symbols, and rituals (Anderson 1983). Museums aid in the process of building this perceived world through rendering the past visible, structured, and realistic.

As Pierre Nora demonstrates in the concept of the places of memory, memory is not a natural or automatic thing. It is established in places purposely where there is historical consciousness together

(Nora 1989). Museums are preset structures where memory is institutionalized and transmitted. The concept of the exhibition complex by Tony Bennett contributes to the fact that museums formerly viewed as instruments of civic education, molding individuals through a close visual display (Bennett 1995). By doing so, museums are not mere passive reflections of history; they create national memory.

Although scholars all over the world have researched the relationship between museums, power, and nation-building, the case of Pakistan has not received adequate research. Pakistani museums tend to be discussed in the context of object saving, archaeology, or heritage management, and there is little scholarly literature on the role of Pakistani museums in the construction of historical consciousness and social memory.

This research mentions a significant gap: a lack of continuous critical investigation of the way curatorial power in Pakistan works to make national stories. Who determines which aspects of the past are emphasized, elaborated, or minimized? What are the methods of selection and presentation of historical topics? What are the official, bureaucratic, and ideological regulations governing what shows are on display? They are the questions that are left mostly unanswered in Pakistani academic discourses on heritage.

The museums in a postcolonial nation where there are numerous ethnicities, regional pasts, political transformations, and transforming ideas clearly operate in the bigger scheme of constructing a nation. Modern nations, as Hobsbawm and Ranger mentioned, tend to employ an idea of invented traditions to establish a feeling of continuity and cohesion (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The most noticeable locations of these traditions' manifestation and normalization are museums. The manner in which these customs were produced, however, requires grave research.

The paper contends that the Pakistani museums are organized spaces of making memory in which the curatorial decisions are influenced by larger historical, institutional, and political

influences. Rather than perceiving museums as mere custodians of objects, this paper sees them as a site of storytelling, as a place where the past is made out of unambiguous national narratives.

The politics of memory in this case does not translate to blatant manipulation. It implies the systematic methods of priority given to institutions to specific stories, themes, and images, as opposed to others. Based on concepts of memory research and museum theory, in this paper, the author argues that curatorial power, defined by the government regulations, professional practices, and history, is one of the major factors in displaying the nation to itself.

This study presents Pakistani museums as agents in the state - building and identity construction by placing them in the international discourses regarding memory and power.

There are three points to this article. *First*, it is among the earliest systematic efforts to transfer concepts regarding memory politics and show power to Pakistani museums. However, they have been predominantly descriptive, i.e., based on saving, archaeology, or tourism, Pakistani museums discussed in this article as participants in more general discourses about nation building, power, and memory as produced (Anderson 1983; Nora 1989; Bennett 1995). It changes the emphasis of mere heritage management to the analysis of museums.

Second, it connects the process of writing history and the work of the museum, demonstrating how archives are brought to visual life. It shows that the transition between archives and galleries is not merely a technical necessity but also an intellectual orientation and an institutional option. *Third*, the research presents a policy-based argument to enhance museum research in Pakistan. In identifying the lacunae in the training of curators and their studies, it demands a more open, research-based, and dialogue-based museology that is capable of dealing with the nuances of national memory. By revising the idea of museums as constructors of historical consciousness, and not mere repositories of items, this paper will aim to start a broader debate that can

discuss the role of institutions, academically, and future heritage practice in Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

The approach to museums as the place of national discourse construction needs an interdisciplinary approach to the study of memory, power, and state formation. *This paper relies on four interwoven theoretical strands:* the imagined communities of Benedict Anderson, the sitings of memory developed by Pierre Nora, the theory of the exhibition complex of Tony Bennett, and the more general discussion of the politics of memory. Collectively, these structures help in shedding light on the workings of museums as not just archives but as processes of institutionalization by which nations make sense, stabilize, and legitimize their histories.

1. Imagined Communities

The conceptualization of the nation presented by Benedict Anderson in his masterpiece *Imagined Communities* (1983) is that of a socially constructed space, created through mutual narratives, symbols, and time frames. The nations are not imagined as fictitious, but simply because members of the smallest nation will never get to know most of their fellow members, but they imagine themselves to be a part of a larger community (Anderson 1983).

Although Anderson focuses on print capitalism as the machinery of national imagination, namely, newspapers, novels, and maps, museums are seen as the spatial projections of the process. Museums transform the history of the nation into material that is organized into time in chronological and thematic order. They make abstract continuity of historical existence apparent. The gallery turned into a spatial narrative, and the visitors are guided through curated displays of the origin, struggle, achievement, and identity.

Museums are used as the institutional spaces in which the imagined community is visually stabilized in the Pakistani context, in which postcolonial state

formation entailed the articulation of coherent historical narrative after 1947. The country is not just described by means of curated exhibits, selective stress, and symbolic representation; it is on display.

2. Sites of Memory

Pierre Nora, who coined the term “lieux de la memoire” (sites of memory), further intensifies the analysis. Nora claims that contemporary societies establish institutional locations, such as monuments, archives, and museums, simply because organic, lived memory has been undermined (Nora 1989). Memory is conscious; data is stored, and stored. Museums are thus not dormant sites of memory but living objects that are meant to cement the collective identity. They represent the shift of Nora between the “milieux de memoire” (environs of memory) and institutionalized places that maintain and formalize memory (Nora 1989).

This institutionalization of memory takes on special importance in postcolonial states like Pakistan. The museum acts as a stabilizing mechanism where there is a regional diversity, transition of politics, and ideological shift. When organizing exhibitions, complicated historical processes are converted into meaningful narratives. The process of formalizing memory, however, as Nora insinuates, is never a process that does not involve any way of selection. Decisions regarding relevance, continuity, and representational priority determine what institutional memory is. This way, the museum transformed into a kind of guardian of memory and a place where the memory is ordered.

3. The Exhibition Complex

The idea of an exhibition complex, offered by Tony Bennett, gives a critical perspective in terms of which one can analyze the connection between museums and state power. According to Bennett, museums of the nineteenth century were neither neutral spaces of education, but the tools of civic governance, which aimed at molding citizen

behavior by means of controlled visibility (Bennett 1995). Museums helped bring together objects and audiences in different structured spaces, which is what he refers to as a technology of public teaching. According to the exhibition complex, two key dynamics were identified:

- The state's involvement in structuring knowledge to be exhibited publicly.
- The didactic role of exhibitions in the formation of shared knowledge.

In this perspective, museums are enclosed in a larger governmental rationality. They not only generate historical discourses, but also norms of citizenship, belonging, and national virtue. The application of this framework in Pakistan would be to place museums in the changing institutional and political environment of the country. The curatorial power is based within the administrative systems, financial priorities, and policy frameworks that project the broader state goals. Museums, therefore, are pedagogic places in which the past is organized in order to educate civic imagination and civic identity.

4. Establishing the Politics of Memory.

The politics of memory is the concept that explains the systematic negotiations of the past by society, institutionalization, and interpretation of the historical events (Huyssen 2003). It does not mean manipulation in the conspiratorial sense; it just accepts the fact that memory is selective in nature, power relations, institutional authority, and cultural priorities. The insights provided by Michel Foucault on the relationship between knowledge and power shed more light on this process. Production of knowledge - such as historical knowledge - is institutionalized in ways that govern perceived legitimate, visible, and authoritative (Foucault 1977). Museums, as producers of knowledge, are engaged in this regulatory role by converting the archival content into official narratives.

The politics of memory consequently exists at several levels:

- **Selection:** The choice of what artifacts and narratives to present.
- **Framing:** Contrasting objects in interpretive discourses.
- **Silence:** Thematic prioritization that cannot help but leave something less stressed.
- **Pedagogy:** Organizing popular cognition by designing exhibitions.

Museums, as manifested within the Pakistani context in which the national identity has changed and developed in tandem with the changes in the ideological and political dynamics, inevitably convey comprehensive trends in the way the narratives are given priority. The politics of memory, therefore, offers a conceptual framework for analyzing the interaction between curatorial power and state formation and national self-representation.

Integrating the Framework

These theoretical strands combined give the analytical background of this study. Anderson places the museum in the fantasy of national building; Nora in the form of an institutionalized memory location; Bennett in the pedagogical and governmental role of the museum; and memory studies theorists in stressing the discriminate and power-filled nature of remembering. Through the combination of these views, this paper philosophizes Pakistani museums as not only an institution of heritage but also an organized arena of memory, power, and nation-building. The museum turns out to be a place in which historical continuity is exhibited, in which identity is pictured, in which the collective memory is institutionalized, in wider contexts of governance and cultural policy.

Research Methodology

In this work, a qualitative and interpretive research method was employed to examine the role of museums as places where stories are created and memories are stored. It does not center on the attitude of the visitors but rather on how the curators manipulate the narratives and the manner in which they present things. The study is based on a historical approach, including studying archives and visiting exhibitions. It is driven by the thoughts of museums as places of dialogue, rather than merely safe boxes of things (Macdonald 2002; Smith 2006).

1. Research Design

Field notes collected between 2022 and 2024 in state museums in Lahore Museum, Pakistan Monument Museum in Islamabad, and the Army Museum in Lahore. These museums were selected because they make a significant contribution to the narrative about the country and its history. Historical research is useful in studying places that were created to give meaning based on stories, symbolic meaning, and teaching based on space (Tosh 2015). Here, museums are interpreted as cultural texts, which can be read in how they display, organize, and present things, informing us of the concealed stories (Macdonald 2002). Use in this study the theories of memory and power from previous chapters. Rather than testing numbers, the researcher would like to find out how the curatorial decisions influence what people believe history is like. This is in line with those strategies that consider the process by which institutions determine what is public and legitimate (Smith 2006).

2. Analysis, Archival, and Exhibits.

The paper is based on two primary types of sources: museum documents and what is displayed on the exhibits. Museum catalogs, official books, curator notes, exhibition guides, policy papers, and government heritage plans are examples of archival sources. These demonstrate the intentions of the

museum and the reasons why the way it displays things is the way it is. Not only do the researchers consider these documents as facts, but they also see them as hints about the way authority is structured in heritage (Foucault 1977).

The primary component of the work is the exhibit analysis. Exhibitions are perceived as objects, captions, design, and arrangement. The paper examines the roles of museums in making things visible and educating individuals (Bennett 1995).

The analysis examines how galleries are organized by theme and over time, focusing on the significance of items, label and panel texts, and the organization of visual importance and space. It emphasizes understanding entire collections and a clear national account, based on the idea that contemporary memory is structured and spatially placed in museums (Nora 1989).

3. Observational Approach

Field notes are a result of pre-planned trips to large national museums. It is based on the concepts of museum ethnography and space analysis that demonstrate the significance of walking through a gallery as a visitor would (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). Museums also talk using words, structures, movement, lighting, and the use of space. Recorded: The tales are used when entering to show how humans pass through galleries, the space's transformation over time, exhibit location and size, and visitor learning tools.

These notes made us notice the way the emphasis on the story is incorporated in the exhibit design. Museum spaces, as Macdonald puts it, influence the narratives that people can unravel (Macdonald 2002). The design is incorporated in the politics of memory. The observations facilitate and archive work through putting the museum plans into reality.

4. Scope and Limitations

The paper examines state museums, which are significant in the construction of the national history. It does not include every area, private, and community museum in Pakistan. This narrows down to museums operating in the context of national memory. Qualitative design will focus on in-depth comprehension rather than generalization of statistics. Although the patterns that were observed demonstrate the functioning of curatorial power, they are not the entire list of all the practices that are practiced in museums in the country. Used neither visitor surveys nor visitor reaction studies. Future studies may focus on the ways of reading and working with museum tales among different people.

Lastly, there is a change in museum shows over time. The findings are based on our observations from 2022 to 2024. Although exhibits may be altered subsequently, the manner in which they are interpreted will remain functional due to the breadth of the theory of memory, power, and development of knowledge by institutions (Anderson 1983; Bennett 1995; Nora 1989). Analyzed what has been observed between 2022 and 2024; further evolution can transform certain displays; however, the general manner in which it is observed remains handy.

Museums, State Formation and Narrative Shifts in Pakistan.

Pakistan's museum development is associated with the way the state arose in 1947. It found that new nations tend to claim their legitimacy by the use of museums and other cultural attractions in developing countries to hold history in one place and to declare national identity. Museums in Pakistan used to rebrand the past in order to address the symbolic requirements of the new nation.

At the time of Pakistan's independence, the British constructed numerous museums and archaeological sites. Indicatively, the Lahore Museum was originally constructed to catalog and

exhibit the ancient relics of the subcontinent as per the British norms.

The newly established Pakistani government needed to make a choice on how to utilize the old artifacts in a tale that emphasized the Muslim identity and the boundaries of the country. According to Anderson, a nation should narrate what it tells using symbols and institutions. This story could be seen in museums. During the short period after independence, the heritage priorities channeled to building historical continuity between:

- The medieval Muslim civilizations of South Asia.
- The thoughts that gave birth to the Pakistan Movement.
- The political success of the independence in 1947.

This tale attempted to unite various periods, such as the Indus Valley, Islamic conquerors, the fight against the British, and the Pakistan Movement, all in one understandable story. Jalal claims that Pakistan had discussions regarding its ideas, which were important in the early nation-building. Museums assisted by demonstrating certain sections of this story to people. At this initial stage, preservation of artifacts was less crucial, but museums also began to display them on a national scale. The ancient culture was not discarded, but it was put on a route that connected the ancient civilization with the new nation.

1. Ideological Recalibrations between political phases.

The development of Pakistan has not been linear. Civilian leaders, military leaders, and rule for progress and new ideas all transformed the manner in which people discussed the nation. These changes have been evident in museums and other cultural places. The memory research indicates that politics can alter what people are able to remember together.

With a change in priorities of a country, the narration of the past alters.

In Pakistan, one can see that every government has discussed more or less about religion, land, progress, and safety. In the instances where the country subscribed to Islamic concepts, museums emphasized Islamic history more. Leaders who were concerned with progress exhibited heritage as a development attribute. The old stories were not swept out by these changes, but rather, what was being given prominence and the way it was being done changed. According to Hobsbawm and Ranger, modern states continue to reinterpret tradition in order to remain coherent. Pakistan changed its stories similarly in museums. Museums then managed to be more of a change rather than a non-changing thing. They adjust to the changes in politics and still want to have some sort of the past.

2. Institutional Development

A top-down government and bureaucracy have influenced the emergence of museums in Pakistan. Departments of archaeology, culture, or tourism normally handle heritage. This puts museums within the government rather than allowing them to work autonomously. Bennett refers to museums as a teaching instrument because museums display exhibitions that are relevant to government plans. The same was witnessed in Pakistan.

The major aspect in the development of museums in Pakistan is the close relationship between archaeology and museum activities. This preserves artifacts in good condition and prevents the expansion of museums as an independent study area. The contemporary museums have shifted their attention to emerging methods of explaining things, engaging people, and collaborating with other subjects.

New ideas take a long time to spread since the study of museums in Pakistan is not completely established. However, in the recent past, museums have incorporated modern technologies, themed rooms, and interactive performances. These

developments reflect the situation in the global world concerning heritage work. They also demonstrate that museums are increasingly being regarded as educational centers to the populace, rather than repositories of ancient objects.

3. Museums in the Arc of State Formation.

Altogether, the history of museums in Pakistan traces the development of the country. In the very beginning, it was mainly about constructing a common narrative and basing an ideology. The talk of the nation changed, and what was highlighted altered in the subsequent government. The expansion of museums occurred within the framework of government structures that maintain them as government property. Museums are not mere museums, but they are a part of the past, and they used to make national identity.

According to Anderson, a country is constantly imagined. Museums are the institutions where this imagination is demonstrated and transformed in Pakistan. By putting the development of museums in the framework of state building, this demonstrates that authority to govern museums is based on history. It is not only based on expertise, but rather on the way the government operates, its supported ideas, and altering the national visions.

Curatorial, Authoritative, and Narrative Construction.

Curators and institutions that guide the museums are the designers of national memory, if museums are architects of national memory. The construction of narratives in museums is not a spontaneous process, but a constructed process involving administrative structures, funding processes, professional standards, and policy guidelines. To know who is curating the nation, however, it is necessary to look at the institutional structures under which curatorial decisions are taken.

Based on the critical museum studies, this section examines the intersection of the governance

structures, bureaucratic processes, archival mediation, and cultural policy as a way of framing exhibition narratives. Museums are entrenched in governmental rationalities, according to Bennett (1995), museums do not exist in an outer world, but rather they exist as a component of the state machinery. This embeddedness plays an important role in creating the narrative in Pakistan.

1. Governance Structures

Pakistan Museums in Pakistan are mostly managed through state-related governance schemes, and these are generally under the governance of federal or provincial cultural departments, archaeological organizations, or ministries of heritage. Through them, administrative control stipulates that funds allocated, staffing done, and approval of exhibitions are obtained. The forms of governance are procedural and, at the same time, form interpretive autonomy. According to Macdonald (2002), the institutional context has a major impact on the conceptualization of the museum mission. Curatorial choices in museums tend to display the overall policy orientations where museums are structurally connected with governmental organizations. This need not mean that it is directly interfering with politics, but it places the narrative authority in the administrative structures.

This dynamic was further strengthened by the centralized system of governance that carried over into colonial administrative systems. Colonial museums were objects of classification and power; they intended to catalog and present knowledge in terms of imperial structures (Cohn 1996). The governance systems, which existed in postcolonial societies, had many bureaucratic aspects as they incorporated museums in the formal state machinery. The authority of the curator is not individual in such arrangements. Directors, advisory boards, ministry officials, and bureaucratic committees form exhibition priorities. Narrative construction, therefore, becomes an institution and not just an intellectual activity.

2. Bureaucratic Influence

The bureaucratization of museums has a refined, nonetheless significant impact on the stories of museums. The priorities of funding, approvals of the project, exhibition schedules, and staffing patterns all influence what can be presented and in what way it can be put into perspective. The expression of exhibition complex by Bennett highlights the past role that museums played in the administrative regimes in their control of what people should know (Bennett 1995). Bureaucratic oversight may have an impact in Pakistan on:

- The rate of renewal of exhibitions.
- The use of modern themes.
- The division of space into certain historical periods.
- The ordering of new interpretive materials.

Besides, bureaucratic rationality frequently favors stability and continuity. New or experimental stories might need to be negotiated by the administration. In her argument based on a critique of the discourse of authorized heritage as conceived by Smith (2006), institutional systems are more likely to produce proven interpretations via professional standards and regulatory schemes. In this way, the effect of bureaucratic influence is less direct via censorship than via structural inertia, which is the preference for known stories and already existing interpretive paradigms.

3. The Relationship between the Archive and the Exhibition.

The central aspect of curatorial power is to turn archival contents into an open exhibition. Archives are full of a multiplicity of sources, which can take the form of documents, artifacts, photographs, and oral histories, but exhibitions have to transform this multiplicity into coherent narratives. The archives control what now becomes knowable in history, as Foucault (1977) reminds us. Even in the riches of archives, there is a space constraint for exhibition.

The selection of curatorship must have priorities, contextualization, and sequence. A change between an archive and a gallery is therefore interpretive.

Modern memory is institutionalized, as Nora (1989) points out, and it is found within curated sites. Museums bureaucratize some of the stories, incorporating them into spatial and visual patterns. This process is bound to entail mediation:

- What are the artifacts that were displayed?
- How were they contextualized?
- What is the language of interpretation that attends them?
- Chronological boundaries: how are they constructed?

The archive is the possible memory: the exhibition is the institutionalized memory. This translation is the sole source of curatorial power. In Pakistan, where archival collections have a wide chronological range of civilizational types, such as ancient Indus objects and documents pertaining to the Pakistan Movement, the exhibition involves synthesizing the narration. The choices made with regard to sequencing and thematic framing help in the development of collective historical consciousness.

4. Ministries and Policy

The museums rely on a larger framework that is cultural policy. It is the priorities of ministries of culture, archaeology, or heritage that shape funding decisions, renovation projects, commemorative projects, and exhibition themes. Huyssen (2003) suggests that memory politics usually played out at the cultural policy level at which states institutionalize certain commemorative priorities. National anniversaries, commemorations, and heritage projects are common in Pakistan and are used to influence the planning of an exhibition.

Modernization, digitization, and outreach to the population can be pursued through policy frameworks, which, on the other hand, introduce

thematic priorities in line with national interests. To give an example, the interpretive direction may be affected by the focus on unity, territorial integrity, or civilizational continuity. Notably, policy is a dependent system that runs outside professional expertise. The negotiations take place between curators, historians, archeologists, and administrators in these frameworks. However, the larger policy context establishes the boundaries within which the innovation of curators can take place.

5. Curatorial Authority as Formed Agency.

As a unit, the governance structures, bureaucratic influence, archival mediation, and cultural policies are components of the architecture of curatorial authority. Museums do not construct their narratives by an individual but by institutional systems that govern the production of knowledge and representation to the public. The knowledge of such an organized agency helps in answering the major question of this research: who curates the nation? The solution is not found in the intent of an individual. However, it is intertwined with administrative frameworks, work practices, and state policy. Pakistan museums, like the rest anywhere, are in this system of power. Through these structural dimensions, we will no longer assume some simplistic assumptions of a museum being a neutral space, but rather, as an institutional sphere, where memory is patterned, validated, and performed on a public scale.

The Narrative Preoccupations and the Representational Preoccupations.

Museums are not simply presentations of the past, but rather arrangements of it. It is within the spatial and interpretive limitations of exhibition design that some themes get preference, and others are given little presence. This is not an accidental process but structural. Collective remembrance is a process in which selection, framing, and emphasis

are utilized as suggested by various scholars of memory (Nora 1989; Huyssen 2003). In the institutional settings, the governance systems, professional standards, and national interests influence these choices.

In Pakistan, the aspect of narrative building in the major museums portrays the successive representational emphases that elucidate the way in which the nation is visually and symbolically described. Instead of trying to present these trends as practices of exclusion, this section takes a more analytical approach to them, as thematic priorities that define the architecture of the public memory.

1. Ethnic and Regional Diversity.

Linguistic, ethnic, and regional plurality inherent in Pakistan characterize the country. Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan, and other areas have their own historical developments as well as cultural backgrounds. There are curatorial problems inherent in the attempt to represent this diversity in one national story. Anderson (1983) is a reminder that countries need to establish horizontal affiliations of belongingness through diversity. This is often done in museums by highlighting common civilizational milestones and resolving historical moments. By doing so, regional histories have been prone to being incorporated into larger discourses of shared continuity.

The dilemma is to strike a balance between cohesion and plurality. Smith (2006) points this out in her criticism of the authorized heritage discourse, that institutional heritage structures tend to prioritize those narratives that strengthen national unity. The regional histories in the case of Pakistan are ordinarily placed in the broad context of the trajectory of state formation and consolidation of territories.

This does not mean that it does not have regional representation; however, it means that it is organized. Thematic focus often corresponds with periods of symbolic unity, such as archaeological successes, Islamic dynastic legacy, or the Pakistan

Movement, and more localized socio-political histories may be less prominently spatial. These representational formations are indicators of the larger contradiction that postcolonial nation-building involves: the manner in which diversity can be told in the context of unification.

2. Gendered Histories

Gender representation in the museum discourses offers another perspective on the priorities of narratives. Museum scholarship in the world has shown that in many instances, women have not been adequately represented in the conventional heritage exhibits, especially in the military or political galleries (Macdonald 2002). National museums in Pakistan often pre-empt political leadership, military achievements, and constitutional events. These themes have always been linked to male players, and this leaves a construct of narrative in which the political success in the city is done on the forefront rather than social and domestic. At the Pakistan Monument Museum, the visual sequencing of the Pakistan Movement gallery foregrounds elite political leadership through large-scale portraits of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Iqbal, while social movements and women's participation receive comparatively limited spatial attention.

Gendered history is not simply about the representation of people, however. It involves work, culture, social change, and intellectual activity. To incorporate such dimensions in museum discourse, curatorial paradigms cannot remain event-driven. Gender is not a category of representation, as Joan Scott (1986) puts it, but a category of analysis. Gender-sensitive interpretation by museums increases the conceptual limit of the national memory. Recent academic activity in women and gender studies in Pakistan is rich soil on which the process of augmenting museum discourse can be embarked, although institutional integration is still disproportionate. The comparative significance of political and military events in exhibition spaces

indicates that narrative architecture remains a system that gives priority to public power as a key indicator of national importance.

3. Political Memory

National museums have a central position in political memory, especially that which is connected with independence, the development of constitutions, and political leaders. This focus is in line with the thesis by Hobsbawm that contemporary states are dependent on commemorative traditions in a bid to legitimize continuity (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The Pakistan Movement, constitutional milestones, and leaders are commonplace pillars of national identity that are often prehistoric in Pakistan. These themes are pedagogical in nature, as they build up common reference points in the population consciousness.

However, political memory is selective in nature. According to Huyssen (2003), the construction of memory within an institution is such that it renders the coherence stable. Debatable political arguments, opposing movements or voices can be placed in the frames of larger discourses of solidarity and advancement. The institutional logic is evident in this structuring and not necessarily intentional exclusion. Museums are created to represent straightforward, accessible stories to a variety of visitors. However, the primacy of the integration of the political points precisely determines the lines of the memory of one group.

4. Security and Ideological Discourses.

It is possible to discuss ideological continuity and security as key topics in the Pakistani national discourse. Being a state formed through partition, regional warfare, and the changing geopolitical conditions, the motifs of territorial integrity and sovereignty have played an important part in the popular discourse. According to Bennett (1995), in the past, museums were civic pedagogical spaces in which the citizens taught virtues and accountability

of belonging. Exhibitions focused on defense history, national resilience, and ideological foundations, which operate in this pedagogical model, exist in Pakistan.

Such narratives are most noticeable and point to the interests of the state as a whole, and not a matter of individual curatorial bias. Memory institutions tend to put a symbolic accent on those themes, which are thought to be central to national stability and identity. It is important to remember that knowledge production is institutionalized a la Foucault (1977) and that it controls both visibility and legitimacy. Security-oriented discourses, in such a way, serve as interpretive references in larger pedagogical constructs of nation-building, and support the themes of sovereignty, continuity, and civic responsibility. Their spatial dynamics in some of the museums are a reminder of the persistence of sovereignty and strength in the architecture of the Pakistani memory.

5. Organized emphasis instead of the lack.

Combined together, these tendencies indicate that museum discourses in Pakistan are not based on mere omission but a systematic focus. The ethnic diversity incorporated into the integrative structures; gendering pasts are seldom central and usually peripheral to the political landmarks; political memory supports national continuity, and security discourses support sovereignty.

These priorities help us see the balance between plurality and cohesion in terms of the bargaining of museums. Institutional memory, as suggested by Nora (1989), is selective in nature because it alters the complexity of life into curated coherence. Critical museum studies must, thus, not condemn but comprehend how the emphasis in the representation creates the visual self-understanding of the nation. Using these narrative structures, this paper has furthered its thesis statement: curatorial power exercised by prioritization. The nation was also curated in a way that thematic prominence was spatially and symbolically arranged within the

museum space, blended not only by what was displayed.

The Institutional Gap in Museum Studies in Pakistan: A Critical Perspective

When museums assist in forming what people will recall and how a nation views itself, then those schools and workplaces, which uphold museums, are equally significant. Previous sections of this paper have indicated that Pakistani museums run according to regulations, selective narratives, and influential bodies. Yet, the glaring omission is in place: museum studies are not a well-developed academic and professional field.

Museum studies have emerged in a robust, multi-disciplinary area around the globe, which utilizes history, anthropology, cultural studies, education, and critical theory (Macdonald 2002; Hooper-Greenhill 2000). In Pakistan, museology often remains within archaeology or heritage conservation, and thus, the alternative approaches to thinking about museums are not easily disseminated. The lack of this connection influences the working processes of professional people, their approach to ethics, and their communication with the general population.

1. Lack of Formality Training in Museology.

The major obstacle is that only a few university courses are designed to train in museum studies. Archaeology and history departments aid in preserving artifacts and researching the past; however, museum studies as an independent discipline deals with curatorial theory, exhibition design, audience studies, etiquette, and heritage policy. School programs in museum studies address the issue of reflexivity in the worldwide community: assisting professionals to view the process of story-making and the manifestation of power in exhibitions (Macdonald 2002). Such training assists curators with critical thinking on the aspects of representation, diversity, and memory politics.

In Pakistan, due to a lack of a full museology course, curatorial practice is usually concentrated on preservation of objects and display in chronological order rather than exploring alternative approaches to narrative. Although conservation skills remain in demand, current museum research indicates that analysis of stories and audience-focused work is quite essential (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). Greater training in museum studies would develop cross-subject skills and allow specialists to switch among history, memory, and educating the masses.

2. Professional Standards

A good academic background is essential in professional work. Global organizations such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM) dictate regulations on the running of museums, curatorial ethics, and management of collections. Such regulations demand transparency, responsibility, utilization of research, and engagement. According to Bennett (1995), professional work turned museums into regulated spaces where people explored the collections that were gathered. Good standards give exhibitions more than mere displays; they are, in fact, researched narratives, founded on good scholarship.

Most of the museums in Pakistan comply with the conservation regulations, but lack periodic program reviews by peers, an interdisciplinary advisory board, or regular curatorial training. The development of nationally accepted standards that are equivalent to global ones will provide the museums with greater credibility and story depth. Professional work is also more liberalizing in governance rules within the confines of the curator. When the curators use research, their decisions are more valid than perceived as administrative only.

3. Ethical Curation

In modern-day museum practice, ethics play a very important role. According to Smith (2006), heritage practices tend to contain the powerful

narrative unless they take a proactive approach to analyzing them. Ethical curation refers to paying attention to balance, inclusion, and clarity of context.

Good museum practice in diverse societies implies having an awareness of various voices and maintaining a clear focus. It also entails informing the masses of the source of information, as well as how the stories are chosen and the real history of the stories. Foucault reminds us that curators influence the way people comprehend the past when he presents his view of the interrelation between knowledge and power (Foucault 1977). Ethics prevent this shaping from becoming distrustful and hasty.

In Pakistan, ethical curation raises questions: how are local narratives included in national exhibitions? How does the main story portray ignored voices? How are controversial historical events presented? Developing ethics policies rooted in international museum principles and local scholarship could enhance curators' credibility and community trust.

4. Public Engagement

Museums are not exclusive because they are open to all people and intended to educate, arouse, and help people make decisions. A newer theory of museums challenges the old school of thought in terms of participatory and dialogical approaches that are not one-way lessons (Hooper-Greenhill 2000).

Public engagement encompasses interactive exhibits, community consultation, educational outreach within the community, digital accessibility initiatives, and audience research.

According to Macdonald (2002), museums are progressing into areas of controversy, rather than exhibition. More participatory engagement would make the museums in Pakistan more relevant, particularly to the youth. Digital tools help a lot. Virtual shows and multi-language guides, as well as online archives, can make people across cities reach. These tools would provide every part of the state with an opportunity to be involved in heritage in a

country where there are numerous regions. Ethics is also supported through good public engagement. Museums should communicate with the communities and the authority of narratives distributed, not merely in the institutions.

5. Is it possible to bridge the Institutional Gap?

Pakistan requires intensive museum research at the institutional and scholarly level. The reinforcement of museology would:

- Deepen story analysis
- Make Curatorial work professional.
- Advance morality in the image.
- Enhance citizens' engagement.

This does not require great change, but learning development. Connecting the study of disciplines together and establishing professional guidelines and practice-reflection, the museums of Pakistan can transform into not a place of conservation employment, but a place of discourse about the past. Anderson (1983) makes us remember that nations are always imagined. The organizations generating these imaginations need to possess good academics, moral systems, and involved individuals. One of the most important development steps towards ensuring that national memory is not obscured, that it is meaningful and authentic to the society it comes to represent, is the establishment of critical museum studies in Pakistan.

Plural and Dialogical Museology.

Since the Pakistani museums have traditionally formed the national memory in a formal manner, the further question is what they can do to become more diverse, thoughtful, and engaging to the masses. The current research in modern museums is centered on dialogue methods beyond the single-narrative approach to include research and participation (Macdonald 2002; Hooper-Greenhill 2000). Since Pakistan is a multi-linguistic, multi-regional, and

multi-historic country, pluralization of museums is not only an objective but also a necessity for a healthy civic debate. This section describes the way to accomplish this shift through the synthesis of information in diverse disciplines, sharing power over narratives, digital tools, and policy transformation clarification.

1. Interdisciplinary Integration

Nowadays, museums rely not only on archaeology and on artifacts. They import history, anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, gender studies, media studies, and public policy. According to Macdonald (2002), museums are a blend of knowledge creation and cultural display, hence they require interdisciplinary collaboration. When Pakistan invests more in this cooperation, its museums will be able to tell more than the date-related stories. Historians give the background, anthropologists display cultural habits, sociologists examine identity, gender scholars review shows to find out whether they are fair, and media experts clarify the explanations.

Such collaboration challenges the defined heritage discourse, which Smith (2006) discusses, in which a few professionals determine what counts as legitimate. A plural museum allows numerous qualified perspectives and stories to be more complicated and not confined to a single discipline. This can be done through advisory boards consisting of various scholars and collaborative teams when it comes to curating the exhibition, placing scholars in the curatorial decisions.

2. Decentralized Narrative Authority.

In order to create a museum that is based on dialogue, the storytellers needed to be reconsidered. Conventionally, narrative production stays within a single office. It is good that unity exists, though excessive central control will prevent variation of stories. Decentralization does not reduce things and does not pull them into pieces, but welcomes more

individuals to contribute to formulating the narratives. Local historians, local scholars, instructors, and cultural workers can contribute useful ideas. According to Anderson (1983), the countries are constructed through collective narratives and, therefore, inclusion of extra voices does not weaken unity; on the contrary, it strengthens it.

Global museums with the population engaged have gained more trust (Hooper-Greenhill 2000). In Pakistan, decentralizing power by giving more power to the local voices may appear as follows: There are various regional exhibitions, which vary with time. Collaborating with local universities to sell shows. Panels composed of members of the community. Adding oral histories next to the archive items. The steps ensure that museum stories remain in touch with society and remain academic.

3. Perpetual Digital and Participatory Heritage.

The digital tools are able to transform the way the plural museums operate. According to Huyssen (2003), new means of remembering are usually digital, outside physical structures. Museums are not confined to the gallery anymore; they can engage individuals with virtual collections, interactive applications, and online exhibitions in numerous languages. In Pakistan, numerous locations are not close to museums or are poorly infrastructure. Online projects have the potential to make everyone's heritage. There would be more people reached through online collections, scanned books, virtual tours, and learning sites, which would assist the researchers.

People can also contribute to history. Oral stories, local memories, and community files can be shared on online platforms. Not all these activities undermine the control of the museum; they bring numerous perspectives in a regulated manner. According to Macdonald (2002), contemporary museums are talkback rather than lecture-only

institutions. The fact that we can interact using digital tools makes this talk more real.

4. Policy Roadmap

Pakistan requires an articulate cultural policy to realize a plurality of museums. Such a plan could include the implementation of the National Museum Study Programs, which blend theory, ethics, conservation, and public history into university courses. Applying international standards, such as ICOM ethics, can help establish professional objectives, while establishing cross-field councils—guided by Section 7(1) and 7(2)(c) of the Companies Act 2006 (UK)—can make storytelling more moderate and scholarly. Additionally, digital funding should be directed toward online projects to attract more visitors, and formal mechanisms should be organized to incorporate local voices into storytelling and uphold overall order.

These measures are based on the concept of government regulations, which Bennett (1995) develops in her view that museums are not isolated, but require the policy to be changed. Having examined the institutional structures and narrative priorities that shape museum discourse in Pakistan, it becomes important to consider how museums may evolve into more plural, participatory, and critically reflective spaces. Contemporary museums increasingly view museums not merely as repositories of heritage, but as dynamic sites of dialogue, negotiation, and public engagement.”

Towards the Responsible and Reflective Memory

The plural, the dialogue museum, does not disunite the country. It demonstrates that long-term unity is possible by considering diversity. According to Nora (1989), the places of memory should be well arranged. The task of everyone, scholars, politicians, and cultural individuals, is to ensure that care is just, sincere, and mindful.

In Pakistan, if we encourage cross-field study, allow more voices to create narratives, apply digital

means, and create effective policy modifications, museums will become vibrant places of dialogue, rather than simply old boxes. Such a change would go beyond the update of heritage; it would reinforce the concepts of national memory.

Conclusion

The research started with the question of who shapes the nation. Museums in Pakistan are not just repositories of old objects but spaces for discussing ideas and examining institutions. They gather, preserve, and display national memories. Based on Anderson’s concept of imagined communities, Nora’s sites of memory, and Bennett’s exhibition complex, the paper argues that museums blend memory, power, and education. Pakistan’s museums have increased alongside the state. Exhibits reflect political shifts since independence, influenced by rules, officials, archives, and cultural policies. These decisions are not just about inclusion or exclusion but about emphasizing certain narratives to maintain clarity.

However, Pakistani museum work remains incomplete, lacking integration across sectors and public engagement. Museums must go beyond mere conservation, considering diverse ethnic, regional, gendered, and political perspectives.

Viewing museums as responsible memory spaces alters their role. Responsible memory involves ethically balancing collective memory by transparently and inclusively presenting facts, as Huyssen suggests, making museums key to achieving this balance. An inclusive, visionary culture in Pakistani museums should be built on collaboration with diverse disciplines—historians, social scientists, and cultural thinkers—adhering to international ethical standards and encouraging contributions from other communities. Expanding digital engagement transforms museums into spaces for dialogue rather than just viewing. These changes enable museums to serve as accountable memory spaces, where the past is thoughtfully understood to engage with the present and shape the future.

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