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'History is finding out who we are'

By Atle Hetland

"Many children think that history is boring. That it is about remembering names of kings and years. But history is about finding out who we are, and how we came to be what we are", said Professor Hamida Khuhoro at the Children's Literature Festival in Islamabad yesterday.

"We are a mix of people from many parts of the world. We are not exclusive and we should keep in mind that we a pluralistic society. Yet, we are one nation", said Hamida Khuhoro at the session where her 40-page illustrated book, *A Children's History of Balochistan*, was presented.

The general manager of Oxford University Press, Ameeda Saiyid, was there, too, and she said that she had learnt quite a bit from reading the book, which just came from the press yesterday. "The book is not only for children."

Zobaida Jalal, a former education minister who runs an upper secondary school in Balochistan said the same. "I read the whole book last night. It was with pleasure I did my home work", she joked.

In the audience there was a large group of secondary school students from Grammar School Rawalpindi, who came with their principal, Nasreen Iqbal. All of them, including the principal, were outspoken and active, asking important questions, such as: "What do the Baloch think about us? How do the Baloch show hospitality? Can we come to Balochistan as tourists? Why are there so few people in Balochistan when the province is the largest in Pakistan?"

Professor Hamida did her best to answer all the questions and she was helped especially by Zubaida Jalal, who said about tourism that the government had not done enough. She added that it was true that there were security issues in many areas. "But not in Gwadar, where people come and god quite comfortably", she said.

Ameena Saiyid quickly quipped that the next literature festival should then be in Gwadar.

In order to create development for the people in Balochistan, the speakers underlined the importance of education and awareness. "People themselves must learn about their own rights", professor Hamida stressed.

"In the past, many women didn't know their own rights", she said, and added that everybody has a duty to seek knowledge and understanding. She said that in a democracy, people must not allow the government to get away with solutions that are not in the people's interests.

"In the past, many people in Balochistan felt that they were not treated as equal citizens with the rest of the Pakistanis. The province sent resources out of the area but was left with little to improve their own situation", she said.

"Historically, the tribal system was relevant", professor Hamida claimed. "But today, it is outdated. In urban situations, we have totally different ways of organizing ourselves", she said.

At the end of the interactive session, Ameena Saiyid said that we should not only pay attention to the serious aspects of history. The book that professor Hamida has written covers 9000 years, not all can be serious. It also takes up lighter issues, such as women's elegant hairdos and architectural traditions.

“No wonder then that Hamida Khuhro’s books are so popular”, a participant said. “She has now written about all Pakistan’s provinces. I will go get all of them. And I will buy the one about Afghanistan, too, as soon as it comes. I don’t mind that these books are for children, well, big children”, he added.

No Photos attached.
(Tanveer took pictures.)