

Nexus Between, Education, Religion, And National Identity in Pakistan:

By

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Abstract:

In Pakistan the “nexus between, education, religion, and national identity” is a complex phenomenon¹. Having removed the civilian elected government amidst the political turmoil in 1979, Zia ul Haq’s military regime sought internal political legitimacy and simultaneously tried to counter two external threats, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian revolution. Underpinned by Saudi ideology and American assistance, the military regime sought political control through education. The revised curricula became the primary source of the decline of educational standards, and the ideas imported from Saudi Arabia and the U.S. brought serious challenges to the very existence of Pakistan itself. The destruction of pluralism, the new political order based on force and revised curricula entailed insensitivity to minorities, glorification of war, promotion of jihad and martyrdom, and paved the way for religiously motivated terrorism in Pakistan. In addition, religious absolutism facilitates intolerance toward people of other beliefs. Peace educators and concerned citizens should take drastic measures to save the educational crisis from turning into a disaster.

Keywords: Education, Identity, Jihad, Martyrdom, Peace, Politics, Religion, Terrorism etc.

Introduction:

To discover the possibility that educational content may or can donate to violence and terrorism was a tough task and sometimes seems like chasing a hallucination. Pakistan is a religiously and ethnically varied nation with approximately 190 million populations. In 1947, Pakistan was created as a

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homeland for the largest minority of South Asian, i.e. Muslims. According to the vision of founding father Jinnah, Pakistan was not meant to be the theocratic state. (Jalal, 2009).

However, soon after his departure some political and religious leaders declared that Islam was the only reason to create Pakistan. Thus, in 1956 Pakistan became an Islamic Republic. (Rosser, 2003).

The transformation of Pakistan resulted in Muslimization of society, with an enormous decline in religious minorities' population. (Nayyar and Salim, 2003)

Distinct Islamic Identity was introduced through education curricula to discourage religious and cultural pluralism. Islamization brought new legislations such as blasphemy and sharia laws that targeted non-Muslims, and introduced religious totalitarianism and fundamentalism in Pakistani society. (Lall, 2008).

Promotion of fierce Jihad through political, religious, cultural and educational discourse sowed the seed of terrorism. (Akbarzadeh and Mansouri, 2010)

These factors contributed to violent religious radicalism that now threatens non-Muslim and majority of Muslims alike.

The Pakistani education system can be categorized into two streams: Mainstream (secular) and Madrasahs (religious). (R. Hathaway, 2005)

The Madrasahs runs parallel to the state education system. The medium of the instruction of Madrasahs is Urdu and Arabic, whereas the mainstream medium of instruction is English and Urdu. According to Nayyar and Salim, curricula and textbook of both sectors i.e. secular and religious are based on moral and political superiority of Islamic philosophy, have a religious orientation and call for supremacy of Islam.

Christine Fair has noted that the curricula of Madrasahs were devised by Mulla Nizamuddin Sihalvi and called as Dars- i-Nizami in 18th century. This curriculum contains the works of scholars from 12th and 13th century. These books were written in light of the religious clarification of Islam in a different age, and address the worries of a different (namely Arabic) geographic location, as well as Arabic political, economic and social issues. One can argue that the ideas of how to run the affairs of the state in Madrasahs curricula may have limited compatibility with modern democracies, concerning the subject of fierce Jihad.

Historical Background of Pakistan:

Pakistan got the independence from British colonial rule in 1947 on religious line by politicizing religion to accommodate Muslims minority of subcontinent. (Ganguly, 2001). One can say that Pakistan's basis was based on spiritual nationalism. Then, the transition from colonial rule to independence was not peaceful. Slightly it was blood-stained approximately one million people misplaced their lives from both sides. (Gleditsch, 2004).

One can claim, Pakistan has experience conflicts and wars ferocity since its independence. Thus, political violence inhabits a unique position in the collective Pakistani psyche.

Pakistan is located in South Asia, and its location has been given great significance geopolitically and security wise, because of its nearness to Central Asia and Middle East. Pakistan has an area of approximately 796,095 square miles. Pakistan shares its 6,774- kilometer land border with four neighboring countries. In the northwest, Pakistan shares 2,430-kilometer border with governmentally, economically and socially unbalanced Afghanistan. Fastest rising economies of the world, China and India, share 523 kilometers to the northeast and 2,912 to eastern border respectively. The theocratic Islamic Republic of Iran with 90 % of the population having Shia sect affiliation, shares 909-kilometer border in West. South of Pakistan faces to Arabian Sea having a 1,460-kilometer coastline. (CIA World Fact Book).

Pakistan is ruled by the federal government and has four provinces, namely Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. These four provinces sideways with the capital Islamabad negotiations 97% of total population of Pakistan. Punjab is the largest province population wise with 56%, Sindh with 23%, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with 13% of the total population. The largest province by area, Baluchistan, accounts for 5% of the population. In addition to provinces, there are four areas. The federally administered areas consist of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Federally Administered Northern Areas (FANA) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). It is relevant to note that the region of Azad Jammu and Kashmir have its own president and prime minister, but defense, foreign policy and currency are the federal subjects of the government of Pakistan. (Hussain, 2010)

Pakistan is multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society. Pakistan is the sixth most populous country of the world after

China, India, the United States, Indonesia, and Brazil and second biggest Muslim country with 190 million inhabitants. (R. Hathaway, 2005).

Pakistani Muslims place huge importance on sectarian affiliation; 80% of the population belongs to the Sunni sect and 15% to the Shia sect. Hinduism is the second biggest religion with approximately 2.0%, followed by Christianity with 1.6%. Urdu is the national and English is official language of Pakistan. These diversities have brought a serious problem to the very being of the state of Pakistan. Therefore, conflicts and wars have remained a dominant part of Pakistani society and polity.

Islam was the core uniting factor of Pakistan during independence, but this came to end in 1971 when Bangladesh got independence on the basis of different culture and language. Sectarian violence and intolerance within the ranks of various sects has significantly donated to disturb the lives of the silent majority Pakistani Muslims and Non-Muslims. Despite all these serious concerns, the Pakistani civilian-military leadership maintains that "Islam as a central support in defining Pakistan national identity".

The Historical and Socio-Political Context of Pakistan and the Significance of 1979:

In general, most of Pakistani have a religious inclination. However, Pakistani's place enormous stress on sectarian affiliation. One can contend that two oil-rich countries Iran and Saudi Arabia supported and fostered their own ideology on Pakistani soil to gain regional influence and hegemony. Iranian rebellion promoted Shia sect and Afghan Jihad, promoted Saudi Arabia's Deoband and Wahhabi sect in Pakistan. (Riaz, 2008).

It can also be claimed that proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia fired up sectarianism to extraordinary levels and promoted understated religious intolerance and religious prejudice.

It is pertinent to remark the importance of year 1979. International and national events happened this year had affected the lives of billions, millions agonized and changed the outlook of world politics and security. The Iranian revolution of 1979 challenged Western secular thoughts by religious values. In 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought the religiously interested war that enthused Muslims throughout the world to join Jihad against infidels. In 1979, while Muslims were celebrating new century according to Islamic calendar, one group of Muslim revivalists and reformists captured the grand mosque of Mecca in Saudi Arabia in the quest

to bring “religious and moral purification” to Saudi and Muslim society as a whole. (Hegghammer and Lacroix, 2007).

Those events in the longer run have changed the face of modern day terrorism, due to the butterfly effect. Developed under the background of multiple realities and context, the butterfly effect reflects cause and effect relationship of variables. “This narrates to non-linearity in the revelation that the least change in one place can cause tremors everywhere else. This has been mentioned to as the ‘butterfly effect’ the notion that the flap of an insect’s wing in China could control the course of a hurricane in Haiti a week later”. (Davies, 2013).

It appears quite bizarre, but substantial indication is present to sustenance that ideology born in that age has its footprints in today’s terrorism in many other places.

In 1979, USSR attacked Afghanistan and Pakistan became an ally of USA. Pakistan provided safe haven to launch covert operation and skilled Mujahedeen’s to fight against communism threat. In 2001, Pakistan again forged a close relationship with USA by providing all necessary and available means to fight against the “freedom fighters” (mujahideen), now turned “terrorists” (Taliban). Abruptly the USA was fighting an insurgency in Afghanistan which was (and is still) operating through safe havens in Pakistan. Pakistan remained an ally of USA, although it had switched side. (Riedel, 2010).

Probabilities are higher that history will replication itself and “many suggest that the outcome will be the same for America and its NATO allies as it was for the Soviet Union eventual overthrow at the hands of the insurgency”. If this happens, the future of the region will continue indeterminate as was the case in 1989.

In 1979, Iran, Shia-dominated neighboring country knowledgeable revolution that transformed Iran into an Islamic republic. The Iranian spiritual leader required similar political change in Iraq and other countries where Shia Muslim have their existence. (Xavier, 1997).

Pakistan hosts the second largest Shia Muslim population after Iran, while it leftovers a Sunni-dominated country. (Yusuf, 2012).

Mainstream Sunni Muslim phenomenon attracted the substantial attention particularly from Saudi Arabia. Billions of dollars were decanted into Pakistani’s Madrasah to impart them Sunni standards and mainly Sunni sub-

sect values of Wahhabis or Salafism. Polarization based on sectarian standards created an enormous rift within Pakistani society, and sectarian terrorism rushed after the mid-1990s, when the war ended in Afghanistan. Pakistan itself was sensation political turmoil in 1977, when a military government ousted the civilian political government and hanged the chosen civilian prime minister in 1979. In a desperate search for international receipt and legitimization of martial law, a myopic approach was adopted. Pakistan became battlefield for the proxy wars. For worldwide hegemony the USA and the USSR were advancing their attention and for regional and religious domination, Saudi Arabia and Iran were up in contradiction of each other.

All the major proceedings in neighboring countries and interior political power fight forced the military regime to use all the obtainable means for political survival. For this reason, the then government and following governments altered the course to achieve their long-term political goal. (Fair, 2008).

Overview of Pakistani Education System:

Pakistan is a federal region with substantial provincial autonomy. Education is provincial subject and its affairs managed by four provinces, Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. Each province has their ministry of education, Bureau of curriculum and textbook board that publishes books. Islamabad is the capital of Pakistan, and it has its educational board. Through the Federal Ministry of Education Islamabad also manages the educational affairs of three territories, namely Islamabad Capital Territory, Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and Federally Administered Northern Areas. (McClure, 2009).

Federal Ministry of Education is accountable for the growth of curriculum and policy making. It also makes sure that the educational content of textbooks should adhere to “nationalist discourse based on the “Ideology of Pakistan”. Furthermore, it is obligatory on all provinces to seek approval of the educational gratified from curriculum wing of Federal Ministry of Education in Islamabad before publishing textbooks.

Constitution of Pakistan states that main education is free and required for all nationals. (Saigol, 2010). However, this provision of the constitution has not been attained so distant. The World Bank in 2012 reported that only 93% of children are registered in schools. Keeping in mind of ghost schools and fake schools that exist only on paper to claim the funds from IGOs and NGOs, the number may be much lower. The report also presents a miserable

picture that Pakistan invests only 2.2% of Gdp on education which is lowermost amongst South Asia and world in general. (World Bank).

Hathaway noted that “Pakistan’s education pointers remained among the worst in the Asian region, and there was no sign of progress.” (Hathaway, 2005).

The U.N Human Development Index ranks Pakistan on 142 out of 177 countries across the world. The poor performance of Pakistan on the index reflects its educational commitments. In addition to above said problems, social structures of the country also aggravate the problem such as “(rich and the poor), area of residence (rural or urban) and gender (male versus female)”. Furthermore, Pakistan’s education has a threefold division on the social class level. Poor students from rural areas with no access to public education are forced to study at madrasah education system. Students belong to low-income class do school at public sector. Middle and high-income class choose private sector. Medium of instruction within the education sector is an area of confusion. Madrasah and one stream of public education use Urdu, whereas other streams of public and private sector use English. Thus, a difference of language of the medium of instruction creates a class gap. Admittedly, English is highly desirable to get decent jobs and a matter of social prestige. Furthermore, Madrasahs system and modern school system have different ideologies and pedagogic styles. Thus, this educational system produces two very distinct social classes with different world views. Religious school students want a theocratic Pakistan, whereas modern school students mostly want to see a secular Pakistan.

Madrasahs Education:

During the early times of Islam, mosque was the place for worship and teaching of Islam. This tradition survived over the eras and still continues to hold a special position in Pakistan. Mosques are noticeable in every city, town, and village. It is shared practice that after prayer time’s mosques give teaching of Quran and children take part in it. Till late 1970s, families and public were responsible for religious education for young ones. However, in 1979 policy was introduced to build Madrasahs inside or close to mosques. The main determination was to teach exclusively religious education and occupied the gap where public schools do not exist.

The first formal madrasah was founded in the 10th century in Khurasan in the eastern part of Iran. The term “Madrasahs” was derived from the Arabic language which means a “school”. “Madaris is the plural of Madrasah in Urdu language. Madrasahs is an exclusive religious school and is considered

to be an alternate for mainstream education for poor students.

The careful number of “Madrasahs” is unknown because no reliable basis is available, and most of them are unregistered. Speculation and approximation about the number of “Madrasahs” vary from thousands to tens of thousands. Largely, Madrasahs education is personal in nature, and the emphasis is on with whom one studied somewhat than on institution. It is common in Pakistan that religious charismatic individuals found madrasahs.

Madrasah education is not uniform in Pakistan but varies from province to province. These Madrasahs do not follow the ministry of education’s prescribed curriculum. However, Madrasahs educational curriculum is designed by their educational board based on eighteenth centuries scholar’s Waliullah and Nizami’ thought’s and interpretation of Islam. During the 18th century educational theme was designed in such a way to promote confidence and optimism amongst student against anticolonial struggle through the acts of Jihad.

Religious education through madrasahs caters the necessity of the sizeable population and madrasah hold a prominent position in the Pakistani society. Pakistan is poor, ill-governed state and education for masses is not on a priority list. Countryside and peripheral regions are the most neglected part. Under these circumstances Madrasahs provides expectation for education to students. Madrasahs quality of education is poor and fairly out-of-date and do not make students to take active part in “modern economies and social life”.

In Pakistan, madrasah education structure was designed in such way that student, teacher, and other stakeholders became a victim of “state constructed poverty”. The question rises, why parent chose to send their children to these Madrasahs. I believe that they are two reasons. First, Alexander Evans, in his article very briefly answered: “For young village kids, it may be their only path to literateness. For many orphans and the rural poor, Madrasahs provide essential social services: education and lodging for children who otherwise could well find themselves the victims of forced labor, sex trafficking, or other misuse”. Second, students from regular income family go to madrasah education with the positive intent to receive an Islamic education.

Madrasahs have a long history, and cultural sympathy suggest that with all the shortcoming. Madrasahs are still mostly relevant to Pakistani society. For people living in extreme poverty and deprivation Madrasahs education

is providing some dismiss and hope to poor and for some who wanted to receive an Islamic education. With all the shortcomings Madrasah still provides some opportunities to its students and graduates. Some become a preacher to proselytize, teach religion, and some may become political workers of Islamic political parties.

General insight about madrasah education is that it joints with violence and militancy. During medieval period, Madrasahs was the place to reservation and promote Muslim culture. Madrasahs was careful to be the center of knowledge and institution of higher education. However, during colonial era few Madrasahs were radicalizing to fight for self-determination. Later, Madrasahs were alienated on sectarian lines and rigid beliefs in Pakistan are “held sacred”. Founded on the sectarian beliefs following Madrasahs educational board emerged.

Conclusion:

In Pakistan the nexus between, education, religion, and national identity is a complex phenomenon, and as such, it causes serious problems. This phenomenon is not limited to Pakistan only. This mixture has provided fuel to the conflicts of Israel-Palestine, Northern Ireland, Bosnia-Serbia, Sri Lanka, etc. In addition, it also played a significant role in political instability in such places as North Korea, Taiwan and South Africa under the apartheid regime. Governments and policy makers of the aforementioned countries have used education as an instrument to promote animosity towards the rivals. In these ethnoreligious conflicts, the educational curriculum encourages conflicting historical narratives to fan the flames and stimulate the climate of anger and mistrust.

The educational curriculum of Pakistan was designed along the religious lines to shape the national identity based on Islamic political ideology. The curriculum includes stories of religious and national wars and highlights the importance of jihad and martyrdom. Pakistani educationalist Nayyar and Salim noted that school textbooks contained insensitive material towards religious minorities and women. Also, the curriculum includes “factual inaccuracy and omissions for ideological ends, encourages religious and ethnic prejudice, foster gender stereotypes and intolerance, and glorification of war”.

It can be contended that the field of education has remained a battlefield for political discussion since the 19th century over the large part of the world. Regarding Pakistan, the relationship between politics and religion in the

country has remained ambiguous and contested. In the educational curriculum and dissertation, the role of Jihad and martyrdom is very evident. It has been used to highlight the struggle against colonialism; the efforts made towards Pakistan's independence and the raise of the fight against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

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