

Impact of Radical Islamisation of Education on Pakistani Society

By Muhammad Safeer Awan

The Objectives Resolution and the Constitution of Pakistan

The postcolonial state of Pakistan, initially demanded because of the fear of the majoritarian oppression in a united India, itself became an oppressive state, which soon started operating on the amnesia of the insecurities that are experienced by minorities in any social formation. That majoritarianism does not necessarily signify democracy is perhaps nowhere more acutely observed than in the post-Independence Pakistan. Right after the death of Quaid-a-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, the religious establishment (which originally opposed the idea of a separate homeland for the Muslims of India) was given a greater say in the affairs of the new state by the then prime minister Liaqat Ali Khan. The roots of radicalism and violence in Pakistan against minorities and those considered 'lesser' Muslims by the radical Islamists date back to March 1949 when the process of constitution making was started. At the behest of the religious establishment, an Objectives Resolution was attached to the new constitution as a Preamble, where it is stated that the "sovereignty over the entire universe belongs to God Almighty alone and the authority which He has delegated to the state of Pakistan through its people for being exercised within the limits prescribed by Him."¹ The minority members of the Constituent Assembly, S.C. Chattopadhyay and B.C. Mandal from East Pakistan, made moving speeches to remind the Assembly of Jinnah's speech of August 11, 1948 wherein he rejected that Pakistan would be a theocratic state, and they objected to the metaphysical and communal nature of the Objectives Resolution but their objections and apprehensions were over-ruled by the majority Muslim members. Thus the first move to establish a modern, democratic and progressive Pakistan (as visualized by its founding father) was undemocratic. The idea of universal citizen at the heart of modern democracies was replaced with the metaphysical concept of sovereignty.

The second important development for the nascent state of Pakistan was that Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan visited the US in 1951 and aligned Pakistan's foreign policy to the US for the whole Cold War era. The contours of that

relationship are now revealed in a document declassified in 2001 by the US State Department.² As a Cold War strategy, the United States planned to use Islam as a “friendly tool” against the spread of communism as early as 1951. Thus Pakistan became a mercenary state mostly for the profit-making of its military and bureaucratic elite.

Islamization and Radicalization

In 1977, General Zia ul Haq overthrew the democratic government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and overturned almost all the state machinery into instruments of hyper-Islamization. His policy of creating cultural bulwarks through Islamization had resulted in the radicalization of the national curricula. Therefore, in the national educational policy promulgated in 1979 by the Zia regime, the subject of “Dinya’at” (or the knowledge about religions) was replaced with “Islamia’at” (or the study of Islam only). This change had enormous consequences. In the multi-cultural, multi-religious society like Pakistan, the minorities were suddenly pushed out of the national curriculum and thus “Pakistaniness” began to be replaced with a fanatical concept of Islam. Analyzing the five phases of social science research in Pakistan since Independence and tracing the difference between the Bhutto era liberal reforms with those of the Zia-era conservative establishment, Akbar Zaidi writes:

The 1977-88 era marks yet another structural shift in the political economy and evolution of Pakistan with its imprint of the 'Ideology of Pakistan', and the state/ public assertion and use of Islam. Without a doubt, this ideological expression had not left a hugely significant impact on its own times, but perhaps, redefined Pakistan once again. Present day Pakistan is the legacy of the Zia era, despite having attempted to break free from this past (Zaidi 2002:3646).

In 1979, after the USSR invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan started fighting the long proxy war fueled by the American dollars and arms. The American think-tanks and many NGOs were actively shaping Pakistan’s national policies because they needed a whole generation of jihadists, (now, since 9/11 conveniently being termed as terrorists). They served the American global agenda well but began to play havoc with Pakistan’s social order after the end of jihad in Afghanistan. Sectarian killings became rampant; the returning jihadists from Afghanistan waged jihad against ‘lesser’ Muslims and non-Muslims alike. A close look at the syllabus of Pakistan Studies and Islamia’at for various levels is enough to

demonstrate that the state-sponsored hate ideology has been systematically inculcated in the minds of a whole generation of school children, college and university graduates of that era. That nursery has grown into a mature mob of fanatics who not only are waging war against American occupation of Afghanistan but also pass fatwas [radical religious decrees] and carry out suicide bombings in the social space of common Pakistanis. The military and religious establishment weaved a security doctrine that derived its strength from the idea and history of jihad in Islam. Therefore, the military and the mullahs worked closely to radicalize the Armed forces as well as the civilian population to feed their ambitions.

As Dr Ayesha Siddiqi writes: “Historically, our fields of humanities were negatively influenced due to the predominance of national security and the subservience of education to the security discourse.” (Siddiqi 2011). This damaging over-emphasis on a security doctrine has been due to the successive military regimes and lack of political succession. It has had its effects on the way history was depicted in the curricula of Pakistan Studies until 2006, which increasingly portrayed what Rubina Saigol termed as 'glorification of military.' (Saigol 1995).

Impact of Islamization on Pakistan's Myriad Cultures

The areas that constitute Pakistan now have been at the cross-roads of history. Many invaders, conquerors, caravans as well as saints from Arabia, Persia and Central Asia passed through these areas. It has been the cradle of many civilizations and the birth place of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism while Islam, Christianity and Zoroastrianism have been welcomed here. Naturally all these contributed to the evolution of myriad cultures that rise above their individual hues. However, since General Zia's Islamization drive, a systemic Islamization-of-Islam started resulting into the intolerance of other cultures, religions, and even other sects within Islam itself. Therefore, all the minorities, cultural or religious, have been suffering from the violence committed by a single sect that believes in the singularity of meaning and only one self-styled interpretation of Islam. And the glorification of militant Islam has been inculcated in the minds of the young through the national curricula. Like Pakistan's foreign policy, the national curricula, introduced by the Zia regime mainly and perpetuated by the successive regimes, follows certain cardinal principles: (a) that India is a perennial threat to Pakistan's existence; (b) that Islam is the only

cementing force that can keep Pakistanis united since their cultural differentiation is too obvious and therefore unpalatable for the ruling elite; (c) that the military is the second holy power (after Islam) that binds Pakistan together and a guarantor of its existence; (d) that Pakistan belongs to the Ummah, especially the Middle East, and not to the South Asian cultural history marked by diversity and plurality.

It is neither in the economic interests of the religious establishment who run madrassahs nor does it suit the ruling elite to create an equitable educational system. The prevailing three-tier system has its roots in the colonial times when the British allowed the religious seminaries to thrive since their aim of introducing modern education to only a limited class was to prepare a select number of people who would facilitate them in running the colonial bureaucracy. Some of those religious schools were run by Christian missionaries and some formal and informal religious education was controlled by the Muslim religious scholars. This discrimination continued, both in India and Pakistan, even after the Independence. In Pakistan, however, this situation created more sinister implications for the society and the state. The religious establishment was deliberately strengthened by successive governments for political expediencies. Consequently, since the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, thousands of madrassah students (or Taliban) were employed to fight in the Afghan wars. The story of the rise of Taliban is too well known to be narrated here. The disgruntled and disillusioned jihadists, returning from Afghanistan turned against what they perceived as the enemies of Islam in Pakistan. It explains the large scale sectarian killings that continue even today in almost all parts of Pakistan. What turned them into such fanatics? And why even a good number of college and university students (studying rational sciences) were attracted to extremist thought? The answer is simple: The national curricula in Pakistan Studies, Islamic Studies, history, and Urdu have been designed to promote extremist ideology. A significant development of the late 1970s has been the decline of the discipline of History, replaced in turn with Pakistan Studies as a compulsory subject up to the undergraduate level.

Educational Policies and National Curricula

The 1992 National Educational Policy was a continuation of Zia-era policies; and the 1998 policy was again a grim reminder that the Zia-era remnants among the policy-makers were still influential to keep Pakistani society on the old track. In

1999, with the return of military rule, Pakistan once again was thrown into the abyss of political instability and ideological chaos. Due to 9/11 attacks, Pakistan became the frontline state in the war on terror. Under American pressure, the military government of General Musharraf tried to change Pakistan's socio-cultural trajectories by bringing about substantial changes to the national curricula as reflected in the syllabus of various subjects prepared from 2003-08. These measures, however, proved cosmetic as no serious attempt was made to reform the educational system, particularly of the religious seminaries most of which still function on the same lines set by Zia-era policies, catering to the needs of the Cold War era. There is no regulatory authority to control the 12599 seminaries where, according to 2008-09 statistics, around 1.65200 million students are enrolled. They are pre-dominantly controlled by the private sector and the state is oblivious to them.

The condition of state-run schools and colleges is no better since the syllabus of various subjects taught there is equally radical. A survey of text books of Punjab Text Book Board for grade 1 to 10 covering three subjects (Urdu, Pakistan Studies, Islamic Studies) reveals that out of 871 lessons, 318 are pertaining to religion, 299 about Islam, and 261 about ethics with Islamic interpretation and characters. In its comparison, only 100 lessons (purely based on Ethics and in favor of peace and Tolerance) are included in all the text books for the three subjects. As against 29 lessons depicting non-Muslim characters favourably, there are 45 that paint them in negative terms. Alongside 61 lessons that use religion in favour of peace and tolerance, still there are 16 that promote religion not in favour of peace and tolerance. There are 98 lessons that promote nationalism. There is no harm in that if responsible nationalism, and not militant one, is promoted. This thinking is also reflected in the 70 lessons that use religion and nationalism simultaneously. The nine lessons promoting peace and tolerance by using religion and nationalism are effectively neutralized by the 29 which use religion and nationalism not in favour of peace and tolerance. Since waging wars is mostly a male hobby, there are only 08 lessons with female characters as against 210 that have male characters.³ Dr Ishrat Hussain in his analysis of the state of social sciences has pointed out the importance of de-radicalization of curricula of certain fundamental subjects:

The constraints imposed on the universities and academia in general to subscribe or follow a particular school of thought about religious thinking, ideology of Pakistan, history of separatism from India etc. should be removed. Competing or alternative ways of thinking provoke debate,

discussion, discourse and further inquiry that challenge conventional wisdom and generate new knowledge continuously. Hostility towards other view points or defensiveness are not the right attributes for an academic community. These are the attributes of an intellectual graveyard. Some of the challenges facing Pakistan today would have been resolved if there was freedom to pursue independent thinking on some of these issues (Hussain 2008:14).

Perhaps the most impressionable of all school-going children belong to sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. If text books for these classes for the compulsory subjects of Urdu and Social Science are analyzed, it reveals a disturbing picture. Of 165 lessons, 58 are about religion, of which 57 are about Islam. Of these 58 lessons about religion, only 06 promote peace and tolerance. There is not a single positive reference of any non-Islamic character. Not only this, there are even references against various Islamic sects. There are 42 lessons about religion and nationalism. Only one of them emphasizes the importance of tolerance and religious harmony. According to Amer Riaz, an anylysis of such content reveals certain precepts upon which Pakistan's national curriculum is prepared:

1. All positive things are to be found only in Muslim culture.
2. Some Muslim sects diverge from the path of Islam and are therefore condemnable.
3. Religion and nationalism are employed in the cause of war against all 'others', whether Muslim or non-Muslim others.
4. Islamic/Muslim history is taught in a way that the easily impressionable minds of children can be molded on extremist lines
5. The content about science & technology, modernity, peace and tolerance is minimized while war and jihad (only in the limited sense of armed struggle) are glorified
6. Narrow-mindedness is inculcated by ignoring the good qualities of the rest of the world and thus militant nationalism is ingrained in the minds of the young. (Riaz 2010)

The consequences of such ideology for the national cohesion and social fabric of Pakistan are not hard to imagine.

Role of the Higher Education Commission in Pakistan

On the policy level, this thinking is sufficiently reflected in the working of the Higher Education Commission in Pakistan. The founding chairman of the HEC, perhaps bewildered by the lack of trained workforce on modern lines, or being a man of science himself, put too much emphasis on the promotion of natural sciences and the study of various technologies. Asad Zaman laments the state of social sciences in Pakistan:

Those with market-oriented views, especially popular among economists, believe that market prices are socially optimal. That is, low wages for social science means that social sciences are not very valuable or productive for society. If this is so, then there is no problem to fix. We should not invest resources in areas that are not very productive or valuable. Several prominent educationists have expressed the sentiment that developing countries cannot afford to waste resources on philosophy, literature or soft sciences – these luxuries can only be afforded by the rich. We must concentrate on science, technology, infrastructure etc. as the route to riches (Zaman 2011:1).

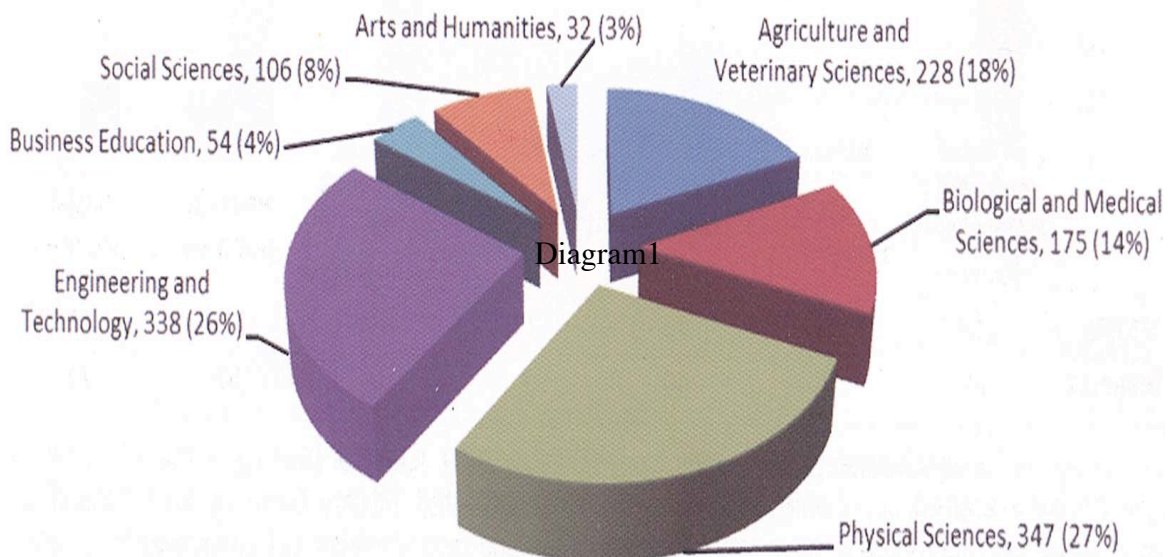
It seems logical positivism – the idea that using the scientific and quantitative method is the best way to understand human behaviour and relations – has been the driving force behind the thinking of most of the policy-makers. Positivism is based on the assumption that the only knowledge worth pursuing is that which is measurable and quantifiable; that the final and fixed truth is knowable. Therefore, since intangibles like human emotions, desires, and fears are not quantifiable, even if they make up most of human existence. Consequently, qualitative methodologies are not accorded the rightful place in the realm of social sciences and humanities because the adherents of positivism believe that social reality can be reduced to numbers.

In the advanced western societies, post-positivism has challenged the narrow assumptions of the positivist methodology in research. On the contrary, most researchers in Pakistan, assailed by the new academic fashions like the study of language and linguistics, conveniently forget that human and social sciences are about humans and societies which cannot be studied as if they are atoms, germs, and cells or mere signifiers and signifieds. Human beings are not like mice and pigs in the science labs; human culture is not like the scientists' culture in the controlled atmosphere of the labs. Humans are complex beings. When one

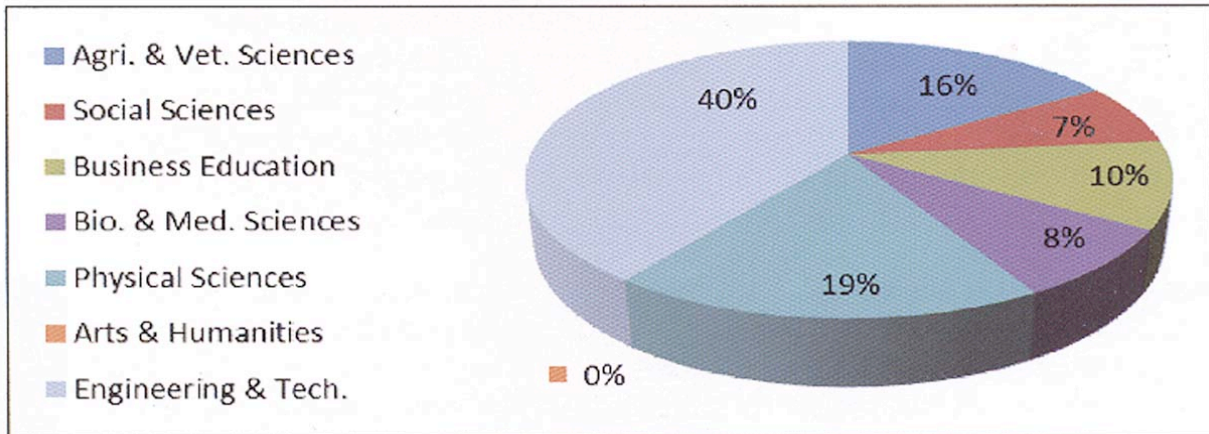
interprets human behaviour and societies, one is dealing, not with natural given facts, but with interpretations, that is, one deals with beings who already live with a set of interpretations or meanings or a worldview. This is the essential difference between positivism and a post-positivist model of interpretation. However, under the influence of such models of economic success as that of the so-called Asian Tiger economies, the ‘Korearization’ of education is underway in Pakistan under the helm of the HEC. This is obvious from the following diagrams and table adapted from the HEC annual reports for the year 2009-10.⁴

Discipline-wise/Gender-wise PhDs Completed

Gender		Discipline							Total PhDs completed to date	Total PhDs completed in FY 2009-10
Male	Female	Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences	Biological Sciences	Physical Sciences	Engineering and Technology	Arts and Humanities	Business Education	Social Sciences		
552	184	74	82	199	149	49	55	128	736	185



Discipline-wise Distribution of Scholars



The figures are heavily tilted in favour of physical sciences and engineering and technology while social sciences, arts and humanities are clearly neglected. The consequences of such an imbalance are not hard to imagine. The HEC authorities often compare Pakistan with the Asian Tiger economies as well as the industrially advanced countries of Europe and the Americas. But they forget that General Zia did not happen to these advanced countries but to Pakistan, and that Pakistan is the hub of global terror, and that its own national and territorial integrity is being threatened by the extremists. The raging militancy in Pakistan is threat not only to Pakistan but to the world peace in this age of terror with global reach.

There is no end in sight to the increasing extremism and acts of violence as, according to official statistics, around 39000 Pakistanis, predominantly civilians but including security forces personnel, have died in terrorist attacks since 2002. These figures are rising due to many acts of terrorism. It is because the nursery that produces suicidal terrorists is thriving due to neglect of social sciences and due to the fact that religious education is left to the whims of the extremists mostly. Therefore, Pakistan must invest in the promotion of social sciences, humanities and arts for quite some time to purge it of the ideologies of hatred and extremism. If the foundations of creating a humane, just and equitable society are laid down even now, and the social sciences and humanities are purged of such

material that promote nationalist, religious or sectarian ideologies of various hues and colours, the hope for a secure, democratic and progressive Pakistan is still not lost.

Notes

1. From Preamble to the Constitution of Pakistan retrieved from Pakistanconstitution-law.org/annex-the-objectives-resolution/
2. Enclosure to Dacca Despatch No. 13, August 7, 1951; Declassified on October 27, 2001, retrieved from <http://www.ph-ludwigsburg.de/html/9e-aaax-s-01/seiten/Brynn/AFP.pdf>
3. The statistics given here are adopted from a research report prepared by Amer Riaz with the funding provided by ActionAid Pakistan. The report, yet unpublished titled as “What are we teaching to our children” is prepared in Urdu. The author of the article has translated the relevant extracts.
4. Adopted from HEC annual report 2009-10, HEC Press, Islamabad.

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