

HEC 2008 CURRICULUM OF PAKISTAN STUDIES BS (4 YEARS)

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The Curriculum Revision Committee of the HEC has published a revised curriculum for the study of Pakistan Studies at higher educational institutions in Pakistan in a BS 4 year degree program BS Hons. The commission included prominent names such as that of Prof. Sharif-al Mujahid of Karachi and Prof. Massarat Abid of Lahore and was guided by Dr. Raz ul-Haq, Member Academics HEC. This panel of specialists awakens expectations of a new and innovative approach towards this academically and politically important field of studies in the light of the current controversies with Islamic ideologies and the highly complicated relationship with neighbouring India and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the curriculum does not come up to those expectations. A new or innovative approach is not visible in its structure and content.

In a short introduction the commission states the aims and objectives of such an educational program as “creating awareness among students about the vision of Pakistan” and “educate the students about the nature of the state of Pakistan as envisioned by its leaders” (p.9). This seems to be a very limited objective of a program for students who spend four years in a higher educational institution to obtain a degree in Pakistan studies after all of them must have gone through more than 12 years of Pakistan studies at the primary and secondary levels of their former education. It seems further that after such a longtime (of four years) the students should be enabled to formulate their own ideas about the subject matter and get an overview at least about the current scientific concepts related to the subject.

Apart from the technicalities of the program the underlying concept of history for Pakistan seems to be the current Pakistani state as it came into existence in 1947 as a result of the so-called “Pakistan movement”. This seems to be a too narrow an approach towards the problem if we want to integrate the different regions and nationalities into one Pakistani identity. A better concept according to this author would have been to look at Pakistan as the territory and people which the modern state comprises of and the history of the people and regions. That would have given the opportunity to include Hindu and Buddhist history and cultural heritage of Pakistan into the basic concept of a modern Pakistani state. To keep the traditional reduction of Pakistan to its Islamic cultural and historical heritage intact means to give away an important means of integrating not only religious minorities but also regional cultural identities into the Pakistani identity so as to overcome the one-sided, exclusive understanding which is prevailing until now. Ancient history of the subcontinent is present in the curriculum as a choice for a major but that is not enough. It should be compulsory for all students who earn this degree as a main part of a different concept.

Another critique is the keeping of the old idea of the “Pakistan movement”, suggesting that from 1857 there was no other way for the subcontinent than to be divided into India and Pakistan. This is a controversial understanding which can not be upheld in the light of the documents of the Muslim history of the subcontinent and in the light of the book of the former Indian Foreign Minister and member of the BJP Jaswant Singh “India: Partition, Independence”. It should not be made the basis of a curriculum of Pakistan studies binding for all higher educational institutions in Pakistan.

Another point of critique is the missing or only random emphasis on the conceptual education of the students. In order to study the nature of the Pakistani state it is indispensable to first get an introduction to political science theory of state and political systems. In a second stage, the idea of state of the secular leaders of Pakistan has to be confronted with the idea of an Islamic state which was developed in the course of the political discussion about the future of the subcontinent and also with the model of

the Moghul state that was existing for several hundred years in the subcontinent. This would enable students to develop a more systematic approach towards the theoretical basis of the problem and if given a good basis to enable them to go for a major at a later stage in political science. Other concepts such as the one about culture are mentioned randomly (p.25/26) without providing a scientific framework which would be given through anthropological access to the problem; the same would apply to basic concepts of Pakistani society and its structure which need sociological back-up.

May be the lack of emphasis on conceptual issues in the curriculum is due to the fact that previous teaching and research in this field has not produced a sound basis for it. If this is so still this vacancy should be addressed.

When studying the current curriculum with regard to contemporary issues in Pakistan this author feels that the problem of Islamic fundamentalism (extremism) or whatsoever other term we would like to use has not been addressed. I regard it as important that graduates with a degree in Pakistan studies are not only informed but have an understanding about the historical and ideological background for the current ideas of jihad and a shariah state which has brought about movements like the one of Sufi Mohammad and others based on pan-Islamic content. The idea of Pan-Islam and its history in the subcontinent should be included in the curriculum. One idea could be also to substitute the traditional and not very innovative "Islamic studies" (which again have been taught to the students in their previous years of education) with a course on "philosophical ideas and concepts in Islam" where Pan-Islam and others could easily be adjusted.

A really positive idea is the demand of the curriculum to teach the history of the province or the region as a compulsory subject to the students though it would be probably difficult to have courses for all regions/provinces in all places. Regional history is an important part for the provision of identity which is a major task of history teaching in any country. It has to be done by recourse to the relationship between regional and national

identity and of the idea of the two being in conflict. For that recourse to the idea of nation and nationalism has to be included as another conceptual basis. The two-nation-theory which was a major part of former teaching in Pakistan studies happily has disappeared in the current curriculum but it seems to be better not to let it just “disappear” but to say and discuss why this has happened.

All the critical remarks notwithstanding there is no doubt about the fact that a new approach towards the subject of Pakistan studies is the need of the hour. It would contribute to a clarification of the Pakistani identity of the young generation and its relationship with local, regional and ethnic identities. In order to fulfill this need teachers teaching this subject in a better way are indispensable. One task of this new curriculum could be to educate teachers for the subject of Pakistan studies and thus provide an improved basis for understanding the contemporary problems and issues of this country to its young generation.