

Islam, Democracy and Citizenship Education: An Examination of the Social Studies Curriculum in Pakistan

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Abstract

Since the 1980s the mission of the national citizenship education curriculum in Pakistan has been the Islamization of society. The government curriculum guidelines require textbooks to emphasize Islam as the national ideology of the state of Pakistan. Recognizing the deleterious effect of an exclusivist curriculum on the civic unity of the nation, some stakeholders propose a liberal-democratic reform agenda for social studies. The main goal of the proposed agenda is to use the curriculum for creating a tolerant, moderate, and enlightened citizenry. However, proponents of a theocratic vision of good citizenship, which currently dominates the curriculum, vehemently oppose these reform efforts.

Introduction

In the Pakistani national school system, citizenship education is imparted through a prescribed social studies curriculum, the main thrust of which has been the Islamization of society since the 1980s. A recent government proposal for curricular reform has stirred vociferous debate from competing stakeholders, whose visions of citizenship and citizenship education have clashed in the nation's mass media, and in organized street rallies causing disruptions to civic life (Gillani, 2004a). The main opposition to the government's curricular reform agenda is driven by religious parties, whose ideology dominates the current social studies curriculum.

Religious parties and their conservative allies play a decisive role in determining the ideological core of Pakistan's national education curriculum policy. Over the last twenty years, they have succeeded in promoting a political agenda marked by a distinctive Islamic ideology (Haque, 1987). Their purpose in presenting Islam as a national ideology has been to: (a) sanctify their political role in society; (b) galvanize social forces in Pakistan against India and the West; and (c) unify the Muslim world. To achieve their political goals, they have revised history, advanced a manufactured heritage of the state of Pakistan, and promoted an Islamic paradigm of citizenship education in the nation's schools through the social studies curriculum (Mustafa, 2004).

This paper makes three arguments. First, it argues that the current ideological conflict over the mission of social studies in Pakistan is essentially related to the question of relationship between religion and the state. Second, it posits that Pakistan's present national policy on the social studies curriculum makes no distinction between religious education and citizenship education in that it seeks to create practicing Muslims rather than democratic citizens. And third, based on my findings of the content analysis of the government-approved secondary school social studies textbooks, the paper maintains that those textbooks adhere to the national policy of promoting Islam as a political ideology for the purpose of strengthening an Islamic state.

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The liberal-democratic vision seeks to build Pakistan as a modern nation-state; it views Pakistan as a multi-faith, multicultural and multi-ethnic state, with equal rights for every citizen. This vision is consistent with Pakistan's founding father Mohammad Ali Jinnah's secular vision for Pakistan, as articulated in his speech to the nation's Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947, when he declared:

You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed --that has nothing to do with the business of the State (Quid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, nd).

However, the proponents of the theocratic vision completely reject the liberal-democratic vision as western and un-Islamic, hence inappropriate for Pakistan's citizenship education curriculum (PPI, 2004).

In the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, and through the ensuing social reform agenda of President General Pervez Musharraf, an ally of the United States, the citizenship education curriculum has become an arena of heightened contestation wherein the theocratic and liberal-democratic visions vie for primacy. Concerned about the deleterious influence of religious extremism on Pakistani society, General Musharraf launched a liberal social reform agenda, calling it 'Enlightened moderation,' that seeks to foster a gentler and more peaceful image of Islam, both within and outside Pakistan (Musharraf, 2004). The primary focus of the proposed reform agenda is citizenship education.

The Islamists categorically reject the reform proposal, citing it as an American conspiracy to introduce secularism into Pakistan (PPI, 2004; Sarwar, 2004). Given that the Islamists have consistently played a central role in the Islamization of education since the late 1970s, it is not surprising that the prospective liberal efforts towards curricular reform have been met by resistance from proponents of the theocratic vision, whose influence and interests have become a mainstay of educational institutions.

National Citizenship Education Curriculum Policy

The main responsibility for citizenship education in Pakistani schools lies with the capstone courses of civics, Pakistan studies, and global studies. Secondary school students are required to take these three courses, which offer a formulaic narration of the story of Pakistan couched within a theoretical framework of Islamic ideology. The aims, objectives, contents, and teaching methods of these courses are provided in the national curriculum policy. Authors of textbooks on civics, Pakistan studies, and global studies are required to adhere to the Islamic conceptual framework of the national curriculum policy (Government of Pakistan, 2002a).

Regarding the aims and objectives of the course on civics, the national curriculum states that it seeks to promote unity of the Muslim Ummah in the world and to inculcate a strong sense of gratitude to 'Almighty Allah' for making Pakistan an independent Islamic state. In addition, it claims that it seeks to prepare future citizens who are conscious of their positive role in Islamic society and the world at large (Government of Pakistan, 2002a, p.5).

In essence, the conceptual framework, aims, and objectives, signify four kinds of national aspirations: (a) to integrate and balance religious and secular themes in citizenship education; (b) to inculcate an Islamic worldview in children; (c) to present Islamic ideology as the foundation for national unity; and (d) to seek congruence between belief in Islam and the exigencies of the modern age.

Although the national curriculum is a comprehensive document, it is weak on the use of the vocabulary of democracy. Terms like “democracy,” “democratic citizenship,” or “democratic values,” which constitute the core of citizenship education curriculum in democratic societies (Patrick, 1999), are certainly mentioned, but appear to be tangential to the goals of the national curriculum. The same schema is followed in the textbooks on civics and global studies. Whenever democracy is mentioned, it is done so with qualifications and caveats. Thus, the term “Islamic democracy” is frequently used, suggesting that curriculum policymakers accept the concept of democracy, as long as it conforms to the moral, social, and political framework of Islam. Indeed such conceptualization appears to be deliberate; Pakistani curriculum policymakers relate the values of individual liberty, religious freedom, gender equality, the rule of law, and equal rights—concepts that are generally the staple of contemporary citizenship education theory to western secularism, and thus deem them inappropriate for an Islamic polity (Nayyar, 2003).

More importantly, because as a mode of socialization and the transmission of values, citizenship education generally takes place in the affective domain, the national curriculum emphasizes an Islamic approach in its affective objectives for the themes of government, state, citizenship, rights and responsibilities. For example, some of the objectives in the affective domain for the 9-12 grade civics curriculum are the fostering of a sense of love for Islamic teachings, promoting respect for an Islamic state, and transmitting Islamic values (Government of Pakistan, 2002a; Government of Pakistan, 2002b).

The purpose of an over-emphasis on Islam in the course on civics suggests that the Pakistani curriculum makes no distinction between religious education and citizenship education. In essence, the Pakistani curriculum seeks to create practicing Muslims. More importantly, it seeks to create Muslim citizens who are also political beings in that they are expected to aspire to strengthen the Islamic state governed by Quranic law. Although an Islamic state is a romanticized idea, the curriculum is unequivocal in promoting it among Pakistani youth. These curricular objectives become problematic when considering the educational needs of all students, especially non-Muslim students in Pakistani schools.

It is evident from the government policy guidelines that the overarching mission of the national curriculum on citizenship education is not the preparation of merely good citizens, as conceived in liberal democratic theory, but the kind of citizen who is fundamentally *momin*, or a devout practitioner of Islam. Indeed, a remarkable distinction exists between the characteristics of the two types of citizenship: whereas a citizen of a modern nation-state has always been associated with the western notion of *civitas* (city state), a *momin*, on the other hand, is a member of an *ummah*, or Muslim

political community governed by Islamic law or the Sharia (Ahmed, 1987). The Sharia is derived from the Quran, and includes the rules by which a Muslim society is organized and governed.

Two reports on the Islamic model of citizenship education in Pakistan illustrate the prevalence of a theocratic vision in social studies textbooks. In *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan* (2003), Nayyar and Salim demonstrate that social studies textbooks published under the national curriculum guidelines stress Islamic ideology and contain material that can be characterized as insensitive toward non-Muslims and women. The report shows how school history books are being rewritten to foster a particular militant Islamic sensibility and warns that this will have profound consequences for the nation's civic life. The main goal of the report is to explain how Pakistani school textbooks foster a culture of religious intolerance in the country.

Nayyar and Salim (2003) conclude that the school textbooks on civics and Pakistan studies contain “factual inaccuracy and omissions for ideological ends, encourage religious and ethnic prejudice, foster gender stereotypes and intolerance, and glorify war” (p. 6). Furthermore, they assert that the social studies textbooks define citizenship in a manner that excludes non-Muslim Pakistanis from either being Pakistani citizens or from simply being good human beings. For example, the report suggests that the textbooks equate patriotism with Islamic zeal and describe good people as those “who read the Quran and teach the Quran to others” (Nayyar & Salim, p. 12).

Yvette Claire Rosser (2004), who offers a western vision on the Islamic model of citizenship education, validates Nayyar and Salim's findings (2003) and concludes that the contents of the Pakistani social studies textbooks “are decidedly antidemocratic” (p. 267). She notes that “Pakistani textbooks condone and even welcome the military's involvement in politics” (p. 284). Rosser's research suggests that the textbooks on Pakistan studies eulogize the Islamist military ruler, General Zia-ul-Haq, and his regime for Islamizing Pakistani society, and portrays India and the West as malicious forces conspiring to annihilate Pakistan.

The following section chronicles the historical context in which an Islamic paradigm of citizenship flourished in Pakistan and discusses the present study of the approved school textbooks for civics, Pakistan studies, and global studies.

Citizenship Education, Islamic Ideology, and Textbooks

Citizenship education in Pakistan was Islamized due to the historical, cultural, political, and geo-strategic realities of the nation. In 1977, when General Zia-ul-Haq, an Islamic ideologue, dismissed a democratically elected parliament, he established a military dictatorship and ruled Pakistan until 1988. General Zia adopted an Islamic ideology on the premise that it would unify a vanquished and culturally diverse nation (Jalal, 1990). He co-opted extremist religious factions and appointed their leaders to key government positions, including the Pakistan Ideology Council, a consultative body of Islamic theologians that wields enormous influence in educational matters. Indeed, it was during the military regime of General Zia that, without a public debate, Islamic ideology was introduced into the national social studies curriculum. Paradoxically, after having

been implemented for more than two decades, the Islamic model of citizenship education has now boomeranged, and some stakeholders attribute the mounting sectarian violence, religious intolerance, and militancy in the country to the national social studies curriculum (Nayyar, 2003; Musharraf, 2004). Although they present anecdotal evidence to support their claim, they raise a pertinent question: Is an Islamic ideology being instilled in students through the national social studies curriculum?

To address this question, I conducted a content analysis of the social studies textbooks currently being used in secondary schools in Pakistan. Ole R. Holsti (1968) defines content analysis as “any technique for making inferences and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages” (p. 601). My unit of analysis was each sentence in the textbooks and my goal was to identify the vocabulary that echoes the tenets of Islamic ideology, as stipulated in the national curriculum policy. Prominent education researchers, including James A. Banks (1969), and Joyce Cairn and Bill Inglis (1989), applied the method of content analysis to study racial and gender bias in social studies textbooks. Content analysis has also been used in social science research to make inferences about the sender of the message and the effects of messages on the recipient (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992, p. 313).

My analysis of the government-approved textbooks for secondary school civics, Pakistan studies, and global history confirms the salient status of Islamic ideology in the textbooks; Islam is presented in the textbooks not simply as a religion but a political ideology or ideology of the state of Pakistan. For example, the first chapter in each of the two textbooks on Pakistan studies begins with “The Ideological Foundation of Pakistan,” which is identified as Islam (Ahmad, Javed, and Saeed, nd; Kakakhel, Ahmad, Khan, and Abbas, nd).

Similarly, the ninth and tenth grade Civics textbook by M. Hasan Sheikh (1995) compares the western concept of “nation” with the Islamic concept of millat, or Islamic regime, and explains that Islam rejects nation and nationalism (p. 19). Sheikh argues that, whereas the western notion of nationalism is based on ethnicity, millat is based on the ideology of Islam transcending the boundaries of region, race, color, language, and culture. Hence, this view suggests that there is no place for nation or nationalism in Islam and that Pakistan is not a nation but a millat (Sheikh, p. 19).

On the question of the rights and duties of citizens in an Islamic state, Sheikh offers two separate descriptions: one for Muslim citizens and the other for non-Muslim citizens. The non-Muslim citizen is referred to as a zimmi. Pakistani historian K. K. Aziz (2001) defines zimmi as “a non-Muslim citizen of an Islamic state whom the state undertakes to protect in the profession and practice of his religion in exchange for a special poll tax or jizya ” (p. 425).

According to Sheikh's list of rights, in an Islamic state, non-Muslim citizens are allowed to practice their religion, build their places of worship, and seek employment. He then outlines five duties of the non-Muslim citizen: “loyalty to the Islamic state,” “paying jizya”, “worship only at separate and officially-approved locations,” “abstaining from creating discord and civil strife in the Islamic state,” and “playing an active role in strengthening the Islamic state” (p. 77). He further explains that non-Muslims are

forbidden from holding key political positions in government, such as president or prime minister. This point is also highlighted by Kakakhel et al. (n.d.) in the tenth grade textbook *Pakistan Studies*, which goes a step further by defining what it means to be a Muslim. Referring to the constitution of Pakistan, Kakakhel et al., suggest that a person is recognized as a Muslim if he believes in the unity or oneness of Allah, and the finality of prophethood (that Mohammad was God's last messenger).

A textbook for the seventh grade course on global studies focuses entirely on one theme: Pan-Islamism. There are eleven chapters in this textbook, of which ten describe the geography, culture, population, history, and economy of Muslim countries. The first chapter, "Pakistan and the Muslim World," provides a conceptual foundation for the succeeding chapters. Other chapters discuss the features of an Islamic society, the geo-strategic significance of the economic resources of the Muslim world, the history of the expansion of Islam, the history of western domination over the Muslim world, and revolutionary movements in Islam. Unlike other textbooks, this textbook has a unique feature in that its first chapter begins with the following three sentences: "Pakistan is a sovereign Islamic nation. A majority of the people in Pakistan are Muslims. In addition to the Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis and Buddhists also live here" (Nazir, Khan, Khan, nd, p. 1). Beyond this brief factual statement, there is hardly any discussion about the status of non-Muslims elsewhere in the textbook, except in the context of the ancient conflicts between Muslims and the non-Muslims.

In brief, I draw five inferences from my content analysis of the social studies textbooks: First, the selection of material and their thematic sequence in the textbooks present Islam not simply as a belief system but a political ideology and a grand unifying worldview that must be accepted by all citizens. Second, to sanctify Islamic ideology as an article of faith, the textbooks distort historical facts about the nation's cultural and political heritage. Third, the textbooks offer a biased treatment of non-Muslim citizens in Pakistan. Fourth, the main objective of the social studies textbooks on Pakistan studies, civics, and global studies, is to indoctrinate children for a romanticized Islamic state as conceptualized by Islamic theocrats. Fifth, although the vocabulary in the textbooks underscores Islamic virtues, such as piety, obedience, and submission, little is mentioned about critical thinking, civic participation, or democratic values of freedom of speech, equality, and respect for cultural diversity. My study also confirms the findings of Nayyar and Salim (2003) and Yvette Claire Rosser (2004).

More importantly, this study discovers that the vocabulary and concepts used in the textbooks are consistent with the vocabulary and concepts that are generally found in the political rhetoric of the pan-Islamists, such as the Wahabis. Wahabism is a radical school of thought in Islam that President General Zia-ul-Haq adopted as a state policy (Kepel, 2002). Since the scope and sequence of the national social studies curriculum were formulated and implemented during General Zia's Islamist regime, it is probable that Wahabism was indeed introduced to indoctrinate school children. Once in place, Wahabism was canonized in 1991 by the Commission on Islamization of Education, which "ensured that the educational system of Pakistan was based on Islamic values of learning, teaching, and character building" (Ghafoor & Farooq, 1994, p. 4264).

Conclusion

The government of Pakistan recently announced its intention to reform the social studies curriculum. However, religious parties whose vision of Islamic citizenship dominates the curriculum, are tenaciously resisting the government reform efforts. At the core of this conflict is the primary issue of citizenship education: what should children learn and for what purpose? If the government of Pakistan succeeds in introducing its agenda of "enlightened moderation," a variant of liberal democracy, into the national social studies curriculum, it will have profound implications for citizenship education and the national ethos.

The purpose of citizenship education is to prepare knowledgeable, tolerant, democratic, and active citizens so that they may function efficiently in an interdependent world. More importantly, citizenship education is a method to achieve civic unity among diverse people. In essence, citizenship education is about nation-building. However, my examination of the Pakistani national social studies curriculum guidelines as well as the secondary school textbooks reveals a stark dissonance between the exigencies of a modern age and the mission of the Pakistani approach to citizenship education. Hence I conclude that because the Pakistani model of citizenship education is primarily religious education, it is an atavistic approach to address the educational needs of children growing up in a complex global environment. Indeed, its aim is to create citizens who are loyal to a theocratic state governed by the Quran. In broad terms, it is inevitable that this pan-Islamic model of citizenship education must have serious implications not only for Pakistan but also the world outside the borders of Pakistan.

In specific terms, three key questions require further investigation. First, what if any, are the implications of the use of the social studies textbooks in the classrooms of the schools of Pakistan? Second, what do children learn from those textbooks? Third, how often do the classroom teachers use the textbooks? These questions are important and can be answered in a plausible manner through rigorous empirical research aimed at collecting information on the content and process of citizenship education in the classrooms of the schools in Pakistan. In this respect, the research model of an international study conducted in twenty-eight countries by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (2001) may be helpful as a guide.

Because contemporary worldwide trends of reforms in citizenship education curricula are also a part of the global transformation, it would be beneficial if Pakistani curriculum policy makers learn from the experiences of other nations, especially Muslim nations, that they may be able to serve adequately the educational needs of their children and society. Therefore, a meaningful reform agenda for the citizenship education curriculum, as being contemplated by the Pakistani government, will have to consider the ultimate goal of preparing the kind of democratic, tolerant, caring, and peace-loving citizens who have the requisite knowledge, values, attitude, and civic participation skills to live in harmony with each other. Pursuing this historic mission would be a worthwhile effort toward achieving civic unity.

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