

---

---

# THE PLIGHT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PAKISTAN

## REVIEW ARTICLE

By Syed Rifaat Hussain

Assistant Professor, International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad

Akbar S. Ahmed, ed., *PAKISTAN: THE SOCIAL SCIENCES' PERSPECTIVE*  
(Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1990)

S. H. Hashmi, ed., *THE STATE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PAKISTAN*  
(Islamabad: Quaid-i-Azam University, 1989)

**J**UDGED against its somewhat ambitious title the first book is uneven and unsatisfactory. Besides a perfunctory editor's note, it has thirteen chapters, over half of which are anthropological explorations of varying quality that have already been published here and abroad. Chapter nine which is a city-level study of the process of urban and social change in Pakistan, sits uneasily in the company of others. Written by a distinguished Pakistani political scientist, Dr. Mohammad Waseem, this chapter is the only one that presents a sophisticated social scientific argument. Further, for some inexplicable reason the editor has chosen to delete the names of the various contributors from the list of contents given in the book. It is obvious that the book has been put together in haste with minimum editorial work. These shortcomings notwithstanding, the volume does provide some useful insights into the historical and cultural makeup of the Pakistani people. At the micro level, the book is remarkable in at least two respects. First, it is a first systematic attempt to view the Pakistani society from a social science perspective derived from the Anglo-Saxon tradition of colonial anthropology pioneered by the British. Second, the underlying themes are imbued with considerable topical significance. As noted by the editor in the Foreword:

The entire gamut of Pakistani society — saints in Sind, Afghan refugees in Peshawar, chiefs in Gilgit, rural groups in Faisalabad, Punjab, tribalism in Baluchistan

is presented in detail. (p. ix).

The first three chapters address the intertwined issues of ethnicity and leadership roles among the Pushtun tribal areas of Pakistan. David M. Hard informs us that amidst apparent ethnic diversity of the Pukhtuns there is an underlying similarity of cultural mores "embodied by the triad of patrilineal descent, Islam, and Pukhtunwali" (p. 1). The prototypical case of this trans-ethnic Pukhtun identity are the Afridis of the Khaibar Tribal Agency and the Kohat Frontier Region. In his own discourse on the phenomenon of ethnicity among the tribes of Pakistan, Dr. Akbar S. Ahmed, the editor, propounds the notion of District Ethnicity, which he defines as:

artificially created and fostered as a consequence of externally imposed administrative arrangements by a powerful central government. (p.29)

Applying this construct to the Hazara society, Dr. Ahmed points out that in Hazara society there are two opposed trends, primordial and Hazarwals. The latter, however, is the "dominant mode of articulation of regional politics," with a "momentum of its own." (p. 42). This Hazarwal ethnicity defines the people of Hazara both to themselves and to outsiders and is integrally related to larger political developments in the nation.

On the issue of leadership in Islam, Charles Lindblom highlights the historically contingent and situationally specific character of Muslim leadership roles. Using Dir and Swat as paradigm



cases, he notes:

Dir has been for generations a secular state, yet it has recently witnessed an impressive movement toward leadership by religious figures: Swat, on the other hand, was founded and ruled by religious charismatics, yet politics there has been increasingly secularized. (p.49)

Other Chapter in the book also highlight the complex and historically constituted character of the Pakistani social formation. Chapters four and five focus on the dilemmas of identity among the Afghan refugees living in Pakistan and role of charismatic kingship in Baltistan. Chapters six, seven, eight, ten, and thirteen deal with different aspects of forms of religious life of the Pakistani people. The remaining chapters address hitherto unexplored themes such as the processes of urban growth and social change at the city level (chapter nine), the social psychology of Honour and Shame (chapter eleven) and the structural composition of the Brahui and the Baluchi Tribes of Pakistan (chapter twelve).

Dr. Ahmed's edited work seeks to fill an important void in Pakistan studies, which according to him, has been marked by "undeveloped sociological perception." This poverty of sociological analysis vis-a-vis the Pakistani society is a direct consequence of the underdeveloped state of social sciences in Pakistan. This is the conclusion of the book edited by Professor S. H. Hashmi entitled, *The State of Social Sciences in Pakistan*.

In Pakistan, Social sciences have remained grossly under-developed and the number of social scientists miserably low and declining. Social sciences, on the whole, have been badly ignored by the universities and public policy makers, although social sciences can and do play an important role in the socio-economic development of the country. (p. vii)

This well put together book evolved out of a seminar that was held in May 1988 in Islamabad to "discuss the state of social sciences and the causational factors of their under-development in Pakistan." The book is important in that it is the first scholarly study of its kind on the subject undertaken by the scholarly community of Pakistan. It comprises nineteen chapters. The first three chapters deal with general but important aspects of social sciences in the context of Pakistan while the remaining address themselves to the evaluation of a widerange of individual disciplines. Clearly the contributors of these chapters were given

broad editorial directions concerning the way in which they should approach the subject matter. The result is a tidy and coherent product which should attract the attention of the specialist as well as the general reader. In view of the utter lack of scholarly literature on the conditions of social sciences in Pakistan, this work must be regarded as a pioneering effort for further studies in the field of sociology of knowledge and specific branches of social sciences.

The outstanding portion of this very readable book are the first two chapters which describe and analyse complex issues relating to the cause of the underdevelopment of social sciences in Pakistan. Dr. Inayatullah's chapter begins with a comprehensive overview of the genesis of social sciences as an enterprise in the West. It then offers a scholarly discourse on different theoretical debates and methodological controversies which over the last few decades have characterized the evolution of social sciences in the West. Against this backdrop, the author evaluates the quality of social sciences in Pakistan in terms of six criteria. These are: adherence to scientific methodology, extent of objectivity, creativity, institutional capability, structural integration of knowledge and social utility. He finds the growth of social sciences in Pakistan to be extremely deficient on all these counts. In his view the two most crucial debilitating factors, in this regard are: "the structure of state and the cultural outlook of the religious authorities." (p. 64). He states:

Pakistani state being essentially bureaucratic, authoritarian, modernising and dependent does not place high value on the production of autonomous and critical social sciences. It regulates their production in a way that they become an intellectual vehicle for reinforcing the status quo rather than a means of transforming the social order and creating a better society....

Socially acquired religious beliefs, fear of being dubbed heretical by religious authorities for studying problems protected from scientific enquiry and social need to avoid public controversy and disapproval prevents many a social scientists from choosing their subjects on the basis of their scientific and social significance. (p. 64)

That the roots of the present crisis of social sciences in Pakistan are not endemic to their structure and functioning but are embedded largely outside the operations of the scholarly community is the main conclusion of Dr. Mohammed Waseem's brilliant essay. He argues that the "real issue lies not at the level of students and teachers



but at the level of policy making about the content of education, administration and educational institutions and development of rational faculties among the articulate sections in general." (p. 88). This bureaucratic control over education and its deft manipulation in favour of bureaucratic cultural hegemony can be seen in the changing pattern of educational policies and preferences of successive regimes in Pakistan. Thus under Ayub "higher education had an implicit elite orientation with a relatively secular approach to knowledge and development of private sector in education; the management of educational institutions was however tightly controlled . . . Bhutto added a distributive factor in the form of mass education . . . Under Zia there [was] a move back to private sector as well as the centralized administrative control [without] Ayub's modernistic vision." (p. 94). The intellectual throw-back to obscurantist ideas such as Islamic anthropology and Islamic social science under Zia can largely be explained in terms of the structural problem of the narrow base of mass literacy in Pakistan. The general absence of a reflective and critical thinking tradition has created a "different pattern of thought-organization, which undermines the growth of social sciences almost as a structural necessity. Here social sciences themselves operate at the level of humanities, projecting subjective opinions, prescribing individual modes of conduct and relying on authoritative statements of both present and past stalwarts from various walks of life." (p. 100).

Other essays in the volume reinforce these conclusions regarding the poverty of social scientific thinking in Pakistan. For instance, in his assessment of the discipline of History, Dr. Naeem Qureshi refers to the "mess" that has been generated by "too much introversion, constraints of the social structure and political system, infrastructural and operational problems and a feeling that history has no utility or relevance to the understanding and solutions of problems." (p. 151).

Educationists, policymakers and students of sociology of knowledge will find this book to be a very rich source of analytical insights and information on the current state and conditions of various branches of social sciences in Pakistan.

## BOOK REVIEW

*TRUTH IS TRUTH*, By Ikram Ali Malik.  
Lahore: Book Services, 1990, vi + 116 pp., Pak Rupees 125.00 H.B.

This book has been written by Prof. Ikram Ali Malik in reply to Khan Abdul Wali Khan's book, *Facts are Facts*. It however covers only a small portion of Wali Khan's book, which meant "to present the true picture and the side other than propagated by government". Prof. Malik has, in a scholarly and lucid style pointed out that Wali Khan has used the source material to suit his preconceived ideas and, at a number of places, quoted small extracts often out of their context. It has also been pointed out that Wali Khan's account is "extremely biased against our national leaders particularly Quaid-i-Azam, Muslim League and the demand for Pakistan". Prof. Malik has done a commendable job in pointing out the glaring distortion of source material, misinterpretation and extreme partiality of the author of the *Facts are Facts*. Quoting from the same source material, he has methodically proved that Wali Khan has been deliberately biased and his book is not an objective study of the period. Prof. Malik has thus rendered a great service by bringing out the mischief in the *Facts are Facts* and showing that the *Truth is Truth*. I only wish he could complete the job by going through the whole book and refuting all the wrong things said in the Khan Abdul Wali Khan's book.

Prof. Dr. S. Razi Wasti

799-C, Faisal Town  
Lahore

## Books

Books will speak plain, when counsellors blanch.

FRANCIS BACON