

THE SAUDIZATION OF PAKISTAN

How Pakistan is changing and what this means for South Asia and the world
(updated and revised version)

by
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For well over forty years deep tectonic forces have been silently tearing Pakistan away from the Indian subcontinent and driving it towards the Arabian Peninsula. This continental drift is not physical but cultural, driven by a belief that Pakistan must exchange its South Asian identity for an Arab-Muslim one. Grain by grain, the desert sands of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are replacing the rich soil that had nurtured a Muslim culture which produced magnificent Mughul architecture such as the Taj Mahal, the poetry of Asadullah Khan Ghalib and Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, and so much more. A stern, unyielding version of Islam is now replacing the kinder, gentler Islam of the sufis and saints who had walked on this land for centuries.

Pakistan's cultural transformation started soon after the Arab-Israeli war of 1973. The oil embargo caused the price of oil to skyrocket. With their new found wealth, Arab countries found they could purchase labour and expertise from across the world, including Pakistan. In common with workers from many poor Muslim countries, Pakistanis suddenly came into contact with Arab Islam, finding it very different and more conservative than the one back home. Overwhelmed by what they saw as authentic Islam unencumbered by interlocutors, many workers from Punjab, Sind, and NWFP – most with no or little education – returned transformed. Some became vigorous proselytizers, aided by generous Saudi grants for creating madrassas.

Pakistan's villages began to change. Their mosques spawned giant madrassas propagating hardline Salafi and Deobandi beliefs through oversized loudspeakers. They soon became bitter opponents of the Barelvis, Shias and other Islamic sects who they derided as being not real Muslims. The Punjabis, once more liberal towards women than the Pukhtuns, also began taking a line resembling that of the Taliban. Hanafi law started to prevail over both tradition and civil law.

Since the seventies Pakistan's economic dependence upon the Kingdom has increased many fold. According to the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis, there were a total of eight million Pakistanis working overseas in 2014-2015. This includes an estimated two million Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia and another 1.3 million in the United Arab Emirates. In FY 2015, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) received a whopping \$18.7 billion in foreign remittances. Of the \$18.7 billion, close to twelve billion dollars came from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. This amounts to sixty-five percent of Pakistan's total foreign remittances.¹

Although oil prices have been low for some years now, the Gulf royals remain the richest of rich Arabs. Five extended families own a staggering sixty percent of the world's petroleum reserves, with the Saudis being at the very top. They underwrite the US and European defense industries with multi-billion dollar arms purchases, own idyllic islands and private jetliners, buy beautiful western women for their pleasure, and have investments valued in trillions of dollars.

Petrowealth has bought the Saudis enormous political influence in Pakistan's civil and military establishments. Against the objection of neighboring Iran, as well as from domestic opposition which pointed out that siding with the Saudis would exacerbate the Sunni-Shia divide within Pakistan, in January 2017 Pakistan's retired army chief Raheel Sharif was appointed the first commander of the "Muslim Nato". This is a fledgling Saudi-led military alliance of Sunni states which claims fighting terrorism as its *raison d'être* but which is transparently Iran-oriented. In May 2017 any lingering doubts about this were laid to rest when, on President Donald Trump's first overseas visit, a \$200 billion dollar deal was signed between the US and Saudi Arabia. Trump went on to accuse Iran of harboring "terrorists and militias" and blamed violent instability in the Middle East on "Iran's rising ambitions".

Bulwark Against Modernity

Arguably no other country has held up the modernization of the Arab world, and the Muslim world at large, as much as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Wahabism – the orthodox tribal Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia – promises a pristine back-to-the-Quran faith unadulterated by historical accretions. To preserve the legitimacy of the ruling family, it insists that Wahabism is the only true Islam. This has translated into a war aimed at eliminating other Islamic sects.

Wahabism is a strong anti-woman, anti-Western, and anti-humanistic creed that has laid the ideological basis for Al-Qaida, Da'ish, Boko Haram, Taliban, Jabat al-Nusra, Shabab-e-Islam, and countless other groups that wreak terror in their respective areas of operation. The export of toxic clerics has helped create a network of Salafi-Wahabi madrassas, mosques, and preachers through which KSA has spread the message of hate and intolerance from Indonesia to Pakistan, and Iraq to Europe to America.

In a recent essay Kamel Daoud, an Algerian journalist, describes Wahabism as²,

A messianic radicalism that arose in the eighteenth century, hopes to restore a fantasized caliphate centered on a desert, a sacred book, and two holy sites, Mecca and Medina. Born in massacre and blood, it manifests itself in a surreal relationship with women, a prohibition against non-Muslims treading on sacred territory, and ferocious religious laws. That translates into an obsessive hatred of imagery and representation and therefore art, but also of the body, nakedness and freedom.

Saudi Arabia is so extreme that several writers have compared it to Da'ish, otherwise known as ISIS or ISIL. Daoud characterizes Saudi Arabia as “An ISIS that has made it”. In his New York Times op-ed, he writes,

Black Daesh, white Daesh. The former slits throats, kills, stones, cuts off hands, destroys humanity's common heritage and despises archaeology, women and non-Muslims. The latter is better dressed and neater but does the same things. The Islamic State; Saudi Arabia. In its struggle against terrorism, the West wages war on one, but shakes hands with the other. This is a mechanism of denial, and denial has a price: preserving the famous strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia at the risk of forgetting that the kingdom also relies on an alliance with a religious clergy that produces, legitimizes, spreads, preaches and defends Wahhabism, the ultra-puritanical form of Islam that Daesh feeds on.

There is an apparent puzzle: KSA and Da'ish have mutually declared war upon each other and butcher each other savagely. But this notwithstanding, scarcely any difference in terms of ideology, as well as practice, separates them. Both believe that democracy is impermissible in Islam. And both Da'ish and Saudi Arabia use punishments such as amputation of limbs for theft, public floggings for expressing dissent, stoning to death, etc. Crimes that are punishable by death include apostasy, blasphemy, idolatry, homosexuality, witchcraft and sorcery, and drug use/trafficking. The KSA is the only state in the world that allows beheadings as well as crucifixions.

That these two contenders for leadership of the Islamic Ummah are at war against each other is understandable at one level. There can, of course, be only one *amir-ul-momineen* (leader of the faithful) at a given time. For this reason the self-proclaimed Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi refuses to kowtow to Saudi King Salman, and vice-versa.

The Kingdom's best friends

Since the early twentieth century it has been known that Saudi Arabia has the world's largest oil reserves. This has been the central fact around which the Kingdom's relation with the United States and Britain has been built upon. The relationship has weathered many a storm. So while Saudi Arabia may be despised, feared and dreaded in much of the world as well as the West, its immense financial clout has made it almost impossible to touch. While it cautiously disapproved of Saudi practices on occasion, the United States under Barack Obama made no significant attempt to influence its ally. Instead, despite occasional frosty moments, it considered the Kingdom as the key to stability in the Middle East although fifteen of the nineteen suicide attackers who flew into the World Trade Center were Saudis.

Washington is certainly aware of Saudi terror financing. According to U.S. government cables leaked by WikiLeaks, “donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide.”³ A cable from Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State, dated 30 December 2009 reads, “It has been an ongoing challenge to persuade Saudi officials to treat terrorist financing emanating from Saudi Arabia as a strategic priority”. Nevertheless the US is currently helping the KSA to crush the Yemeni uprising even though there has been large-scale loss of civilian lives.

In a statement that is remarkable for both simplicity and correctness, Noam Chomsky has this to say about US attitudes towards terrorism: “Everybody’s worried about stopping terrorism. Well, there’s a really easy way: stop participating in it.”⁴ But to not participate has proved impossible, at least so far. Although the Saudis have made no secret of their dislike for Barack Obama, in September 2015 he nevertheless felt he had to reiterate “the longstanding friendship between the United States and Saudi Arabia.” Surely it was the \$100 billion in arms deals with the Kingdom that moved him to say that.

Pak-Saudi history

Pakistan’s relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia lies at a different plane from America’s relationship to the Kingdom. The Saudi royal family lays claim to being custodians of Islam’s holy sites. It is hard to say whether Pakistan’s adoration is for primarily financial or ideological reasons because Makkah and Medina are the birthplaces of Islam. The reverential urge among Pakistanis should not be underestimated.

It was Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who initiated a political relationship with Saudi Arabia in the early 1970’s. At the Lahore Summit of 1974, Bhutto sought to create Islamic unity, acknowledging Saudi Arabia as the key player in the post oil embargo world. The goal was to show India that Pakistan has powerful friends, and the hope was that the newly wealthy Arab countries would fund Pakistan’s nascent nuclear program.

General Zia-ul-Haq, who hanged Bhutto a few years later, deepened this relationship after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979. The United States, in support of the Afghan resistance, waged an exceedingly elaborate, expensive, and ultimately successful covert war. Unlike other proxy wars in Africa and South America, for the first time ever, the United States supported a guerrilla army firing on Soviet troops. With Pakistan as America’s foremost ally and Saudi Arabia as the principal source of funds, the CIA openly recruited Islamic holy warriors from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Algeria. Saudi funded madrassas sprang up across Pakistan, providing a steady stream of fighters. Radical Islam went into overdrive as its superpower ally and mentor funneled support to the *mujahidin*. In 1988 Soviet troops withdrew unconditionally and US-Pakistan-Saudi alliance emerged victorious. A chapter of history was complete.

It was in those years that Pakistan started drifting westward towards Arab Islam. The earliest sign was heralded in the 1980’s by a subtle but significant linguistic shift. Television and radio announcers were instructed to drop the customary parting salutation *Khuda Hafiz* (God be with you, Khuda is Persian for God)) in favor of the Arabic sounding *Allah Hafiz*. Although the latter is not used in Arab countries, it somehow seemed more “Islamic” to use the Arabic god than the Persian one. But this was just one example. Hindi and Farsi words were expunged from Urdu wherever possible. The month of fasting, written as *Ramzan* in Urdu morphed into the Arabic-sounding *Ramadan* or *Ramadan Kareem*. Similarly, *sehri* (the beginning time of fasting) became *suhoor*, *namaz* (prayer) became *salat*, etc.

A new seriousness became evident when the official historians of General Zia-ul-Haq’s Pakistan were tasked with a massive rewrite of history. Today several officially prescribed Pakistan Studies textbooks claim Pakistan was born not in 1947 but with the conquest of Sindh in 712 AD by Arab invader Muhammad bin Qasim. The novels of Nasim Hijazi idolizing Arab conquerors became the rage.

To be seen as Arab, or to be seen as of Arab descent, has been the desire of generations of South Asian Muslims. Men typically have names such as Syed, Sayyid, Sayyed, etc. all of which suggest descent from Prophet Mohammed through his grandsons. A DNA test would, of course, show such claimed lineages to be

false since South Asian Muslims are overwhelmingly from native rather than Arab stock. This has not stopped people from giving Arabic names to their children. In earlier years, it was unheard of for Muslim children to be named Talha, Firas, Mudrik, Wael, Farafisa, Hajjah, etc. But in the present times these names have become common whereas South Asian ones like Pervez, Firoz, Shameem, Firoza, Jugnu, Chanda, etc. are becoming infrequent.

The discerning observer will note an abundance of cars bearing number plates entitled “Al-Bakistan” and “Al-Bunjab”. In earlier times these would have been objects of wholesale ridicule because, unlike Urdu, the Arabic language has no sound for “p” and instead uses “b”. So effectively Pakistan and Punjab have been renamed! Aping the Arabs has reached ridiculous heights from time to time: at a cost of 25,000 rupees each, thousands of date palms were imported by Nawaz Sharif’s government in the mid-1990’s from the United Arab Emirates in the 1990’s to line Islamabad’s avenues and streets. None survived the very different climate.

The Arab cultural invasion has left quite a few Pakistanis worried. One wrote: “Is the land of five rivers slowly giving way to sand dunes, camels and date trees?”⁵ Another has scathingly called Pakistan’s desire to emulate Arab culture as its Arab Wannabe Syndrome (AWS), defining this affliction to be “an uncontrollable urge to pretend to be, or to behave like, an Arab, when in fact the patient is not an Arab”.⁶

Why have Saudi-inspired Salafis and Wahabis been so successful in establishing their hegemony? Of course, petrodollars have been important but the key lies in their stark literalism and religious scholarship. Once upon a time, it was possible to have multiple interpretations from Hanifi, Shafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shia schools of jurisprudence. But, greater attention placed on religious education has increased power of even everyday people to recall and quote specific *ayats* (Quranic verses) or episodes from the Hadith – sometimes in Arabic as well as Urdu. This enormously potent tool leaves pious listeners in speechless awe. One cannot possibly argue with someone so knowledgeable about the divine!

So what do Saudi-inspired cultural revolutionaries really want?

Women - The First Targets

Women, in orthodox eyes, are the very source of temptation and evil. To segregate them from men is therefore absolutely essential. In this regard, there has been considerable “progress”: the segregation of men and women at weddings, and at private and public gatherings, is noticeably greater today than ever in the past. Dancing and festivities are ascribed to “Hindu corruption” of the culture.

The Arab model is replete with extreme examples of segregation. Women are not allowed to drive, nor allowed to leave home without a male *mehram* (guardian), and that too only when fully cloaked. Some years ago Saudi Arabia’s ubiquitous religious *mutaween* (religious police) had stopped schoolgirls from leaving a blazing building because they were not wearing their cloaks. The panicked girls had rushed out without them! Uncharacteristically, Saudi newspapers had blamed and criticized the *mutaween* for letting fifteen girls burn to death.

Total separation of the sexes is a central goal of the Islamists, the consequences of which have been catastrophic. For example, on April 9, 2006, 21 women and 8 children were crushed to death, and scores injured, in a stampede inside a three-storey madrassa in Karachi where a large number of women had gathered for a weekly congregation. Male rescuers, who arrived in ambulances, were prevented from moving injured women to hospitals.



A classroom scene at the International Islamic University, Islamabad.

The ban on intermingling of the sexes forbidden has had curious consequences in the Arab world. Too rich to need work, there is little for most to occupy themselves with. Even cinemas are banned, leaving raw consumerism as the only entertainment. Hence the enormous excitement when some glitzy new megastore opens shop in town. So, for example, after the “excitement” over the opening of an IKEA store led to several dead and many more injured, the Arab News commented in its editorial that,

“the total lack of activity in the lives of the teenagers who went, the bored housewives who sit at home memorizing the various options on their satellite dishes and the civil servants who felt that a challenge between friends over the vouchers would be more productive than going to work was the motive that propelled all those people to the IKEA store.”⁷

Segregation in Pakistan is nowhere as total as in Saudi Arabia, but has substantially increased. The consequences are similar. On April 9, 2006, twenty-one women and eight children were crushed to death and scores injured in a stampede inside a three-storey madrassa in Karachi, where a large number of women were attending a weekly congregation. Male rescuers, who arrived in ambulances, were prevented from moving the injured women to hospitals. I was personally witness to another such incident. Soon after the October 2005 earthquake, as I walked through the destroyed city of Balakot, a student of the Frontier Medical College described to me how hours ago he and his male colleagues were stopped by religious elders from digging out injured girl students from under the rubble of their school building lest there should be physical contact between them and some female.

Segregation in Pakistan has historically been most actively sought by Pakhtuns in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. During the time when the conservative Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal party formed a government there the health minister, Mohammad Nasir Khan, assured the upper house of parliament that the government could consider banning female nurses looking after male patients at hospitals. Women’s bodies were of particular concern to these holy men who banned the use of ultrasound for women⁸: “*We think that men could derive sexual pleasure from women's bodies while conducting ECG or ultrasound,*” proclaimed Maulana Gul Naseeb Khan, provincial secretary of the MMA. In his opinion women would be able to lure men under the pretext of these medical procedures. Therefore, he said, “*to save the supreme values of Islam and the message of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), the MMA has decided to impose the ban.*” Destroyed or damaged billboards with women’s faces can be seen in several cities of the Frontier because the MMA deems the exhibition of unveiled women as un-Islamic.

The success of dedicated efforts to promote the separation of the sexes, and to radically change women’s apparel, is particularly noticeable among educated Pakistani women, including those who live in the elite Defense Housing Colonies of Karachi, Lahore, and other big cities. Proselytizers, such as Farhat Hashmi, have become immensely popular there. There are numerous indicators of success.

Barely twenty years ago, *abaya* was a word unfamiliar to speakers of Urdu and never to be seen. This shapeless gown, usually black, is of Arab origin. But today, countless shops in every city of Pakistan

specialize in abayas, hijabs, and burqas. Some are at the high-end, frequented by rich housewives and their daughters. Those in burqa sometimes also wear black socks and gloves, covering every inch of the body except for two slits around the eyes. This practice is made still unhealthier by the use of synthetic materials that make it difficult for the skin to breathe or sweat to evaporate. While some women are not allowed to step outside their house, others are veiled even inside their house because of hired male domestic help. Although doctors warn that Vitamin-D deficiency results in these cases, this has made little difference.⁹

Once upon a time, the fully veiled student was a rarity on Pakistani university and college campuses. But in colleges and universities across Pakistan, the female student is increasingly seeking the anonymity of the *burqa*. And in some parts of the country she seems to outnumber her sisters who still “dare” to show their faces.

How does the veil affect habits and attitudes? There does not seem to be a proper comparative study. However, my personal observation is that many veiled female students have largely become silent note-takers, are increasingly timid and less inclined to ask questions or take part in discussions. They lack the confidence expected of a young university student. Mercifully, Pakistani men have not – at least as yet – taken to the tradition Arab dress of *thawb*, *ghutra*, and *agal*.



Chemistry department, Quaid-e-Azam University, in 1985. Left wing female and male students are protesting against the university administrations actions. Note the absence of any head gear.



The same university department in 2008. About 80-90% of female students are either in burqa or hijab.

Shoot the Bustards

If the Saudis think they own the world they may be wrong – but not by very much. Their fantastic wealth also means that they expect their every command to be unquestioningly obeyed and every wish fulfilled. No other law may stand in their way. Exotic birds stand little chance against Arab kings and princes.

Every year rich Arabs searching for bird meat with aphrodisiacal qualities descend upon the province of Baluchistan. They travel in convoys of land cruisers carrying radars, powerful guns, binoculars, and scores of servants. With specially trained falcons, they come to hunt a diminutive, waddling, migratory bird known as the houbara bustard.

The bustard (known as *tilor* locally) is an endangered species that has become extinct due to over hunting in the Middle East. It is protected by Pakistani law because protesting environmentalists finally had bustard hunting banned. But, given Pakistan's deferential relationship with Arab kings and princes, it is not law but power that matters. A New York Times report says that "Little expense is spared for the elaborate winter hunts. Cargo planes fly tents and luxury jeeps into custom-built desert airstrips, followed by private jets carrying the kings and princes of Persian Gulf countries along with their precious charges: expensive hunting falcons that are used to kill the white-plumed houbara".¹⁰

The report reveals that Prince Fahd bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, the governor of Tabuk province, was welcomed by a delegation of Pakistani officials. In the previous year the prince, along with his entourage, had killed 2,100 bustards over twenty-one days during last year's hunt or about twenty times more than his allocated quota.

This deference to Arab wealth and power exemplifies Pakistan's relationship with its Arab visitors. The quid pro quo for allowing the law of the land to be violated is more mosques and madrassas for the locals, who turn out in large numbers to welcome them.

Saudizing Education

The primary vehicle for fulfilling the Saudi agenda in Pakistan has been the madrassa. In earlier times, madrassas had turned out the occasional Islamic scholar, using a curriculum that essentially dates back to the eleventh century, with only minor subsequent revisions. But their principal function had been to produce imams and muezzins for mosques, and those who eked out an existence as *maulvi sahibs* teaching children to read the Quran.

The Afghan jihad changed everything. During the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, madrassas provided the US-Saudi-Pakistani alliance the cannon fodder they needed to fight a holy war. The Americans and Saudis, helped by a more-than-willing General Zia, funded new madrassas across the length and breadth of Pakistan. A detailed picture of the current situation is not available. But according to the national education census, which the ministry of education released in 2006, Punjab has 5,459 madrassas followed by the NWFP with 2,843; Sindh has 1,935; the Federally Administrated Northern Areas (FANA), 1,193; Balochistan, 769; Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), 586; the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA), 135; and the Islamabad capital territory, 77. The ministry estimates that 1.5 million students are acquiring religious education in the 13,000 madrassas.

These figures appear to be way off the mark. Commonly quoted figures range between 22,000 and 30,000 madrassas. The number of students could be correspondingly larger. The free boarding and lodging plus provision of books to the students, is a key part of their appeal. Additionally, parents across the country desire that their children be "disciplined" and given a thorough Islamic education. The madrassas serve this purpose, too, exceedingly well. Like Saudi Arabia's system, madrassa education provides an ideological foundation for violence and future jihadists. It demands that Islam be understood as a complete code of life, and creates in the mind of a school-going child a sense of siege and embattlement by stressing that Islam is under threat everywhere.

Madrassas have deeply impacted the urban environment. For example, until the 1990's, Islamabad was a quiet, orderly, modern city quite different from the rest of Pakistan. It had largely been the abode of Pakistan's elite and foreign diplomats. But the rapid transformation of its demography brought with it

hundreds of mosques with multi-barreled audio-cannons mounted on minarets, as well as scores of madrassas illegally constructed in what used to be public parks and green areas. Now, tens of thousands of their students, sporting little prayer caps, dutifully chant the Quran all day. In the evenings they swarm the city, making women minus the hijab increasingly nervous.



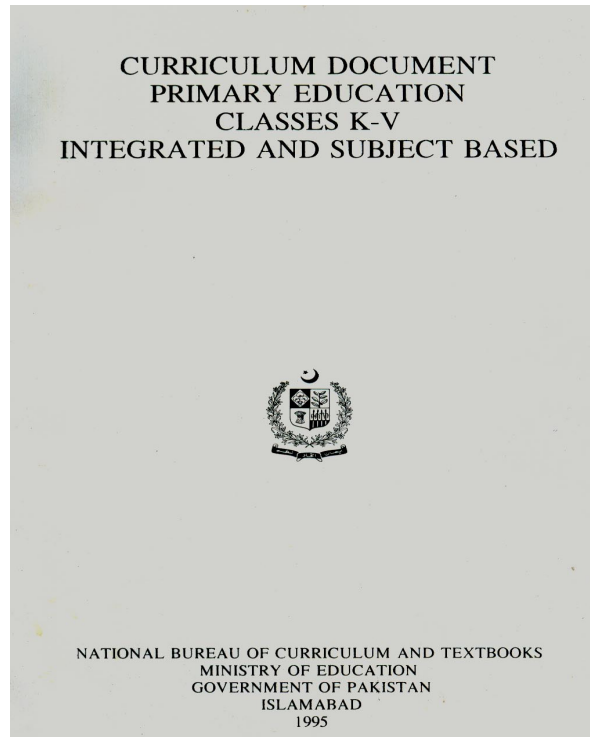
A madrassa in Islamabad, one of the hundreds in the capital city.

Pakistan's so-called "secular" public schools, colleges and universities have been no less involved in producing the militant mindset. Militant jihad became part of the culture on college and university campuses. Armed groups flourished, they invited students for jihad in Kashmir and Afghanistan, set up offices throughout the country, collected funds at Friday prayers and declared a war that knew no borders. Pre-9/11, my university was ablaze with posters inviting students to participate in the Kashmir jihad. Post-2001, this ceased to be done openly.



Madrassa students enjoying a burning of video cassettes and CDs in Aabpara, Islamabad's main market in March, 2007. The materials had been handed over by frightened shopkeepers who thereafter switched to other businesses.

But the world of the Pakistani students remained largely unchanged after 911, the event that led to Pakistan's timely desertion of the Taliban and the slackening of the Kashmir jihad. Indeed, for all his rhetoric about "enlightened moderation," General Musharraf's educational curriculum was decidedly immoderate. In fact it was a somewhat toned down version of the curriculum that existed under Nawaz Sharif which, in turn, was identical to that under Benazir Bhutto who had inherited it from General Zia-ul-Haq. Fearful of taking on powerful religious forces, every incumbent government has refused to take a position on the curriculum and thus quietly allowed young minds to be molded by fanatics. What may happen a generation later has always been a secondary issue for a government challenged on so many fronts.



EXCERPTS FROM THE ABOVE CURRICULUM DOCUMENT
National Bureau of Curriculum and Textbooks
Federal Ministry of Education, 1995

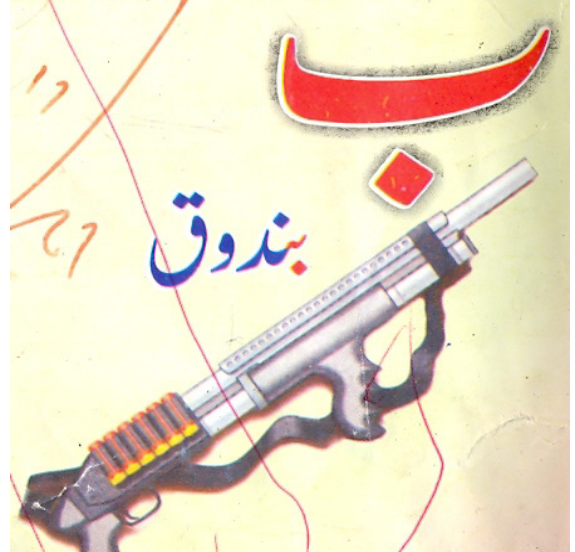
Social Studies: At the completion of Class-V, the child should be able to:

- "Acknowledge and identify forces that may be working against Pakistan." [pg154]
- "Demonstrate by actions a belief in the fear of Allah." [pg154]
- "Make speeches on Jihad and Shahadat" [pg154]
- "Understand Hindu-Muslim differences and the resultant need for Pakistan." [pg154]
- "India's evil designs against Pakistan." [pg154]
- "Be safe from rumour mongers who spread false news" [pg158]
- "Visit police stations" [pg158]
- "Collect pictures of policemen, soldiers, and National Guards" [pg158]
- "Demonstrate respect for the leaders of Pakistan" [pg153]

Apart from Deobandi-Salafi madrassas, the International Islamic University in Islamabad is another Saudi bastion. With a frankly sectarian agenda, its president is a Saudi national appointed at the behest of authorities in Saudi Arabia. In a country where Arabic is not spoken or even understood, the choice of this individual as head of the institution is amazing since he can speak no English or Urdu. A student who studied at the IIU, after describing her harrowing experiences, wrote the following recommendation: “If Pakistanis are really serious about eradicating extremism and terrorism, this University (IIUI) and the likes of it should sever ALL links with Saudi Arabia. The administration of IIUI must go directly under the authority of government of Pakistan.”¹¹



“Alif” (A) for Allah



“Bay” (B) for bundooq (gun)



(ٹ-ک-را-ؤ) ٹکراؤ



(ٹ-و-پ-ی) ٹوپی

An illustrated primer for the Urdu alphabet prepared along “Islamic lines” by Iqra Publishers, Rawalpindi. This is not an officially approved textbook, but is being used currently (2008) by some regular schools, as well as madrassas, associated with the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI). The JUI is an Islamic political party that had allied itself with General Musharraf until very recently. These picture scans have been taken from a girl child’s book, together with her scribbles.



“Hay” is for *hijab*



“Zal” is for *zunoob* (an unfamiliar word even for native Urdu speakers, means sins. Sinful objects are being set on fire here.)

The primary vehicle for Saudizing Pakistan's education has been the madrassa. During the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, madrassas had provided the US-Saudi-Pakistani alliance recruits needed for fighting a holy war. Earlier on, they had turned out the occasional Islamic scholar, using a curriculum that essentially dates from the 11th century with only minor subsequent revisions. In Pakistan their principal function had been to produce imams and muezzins for mosques.

The Cost of Saudization

In Pakistan's lower-middle and middle classes there now lurks a grim and humorless Saudi-inspired revivalist movement that frowns on every expression of joy and pleasure – even the traditional flying of kites during the traditional festival of Basant. Kathak dancing, once popular with the Muslim elite of India, is nearly extinct and has few teachers left.

Lacking any positive connection to culture and knowledge, Saudi-inspired revolutionaries seek to eliminate “corruption” by regulating cultural life and seizing control of the education system. Hence, no university in Pakistan has a department of music. Students of the Islami Jamaat-e-Talaba at Punjab University forced the closure of their university's music department. Like other religious fundamentalists, they consider music *haram*. Later, the university was able to hold some music classes elsewhere.

The Saudiization of a once-vibrant Pakistani culture continues at a relentless pace. The drive to segregate is now also being found among educated women. Vigorous proselytizers bringing this message, such as Mrs. Farhat Hashmi, have been catapulted to heights of fame and fortune. Their success is evident. Two decades ago the fully veiled student was a rarity on Pakistani university and college campuses. The “abaya”, a long robe worn in Saudi Arabia, was an unknown word in Urdu. Today, some shops in Islamabad specialize in abayas. At colleges and universities across Pakistan, the female student is seeking the anonymity of the burqa. Now she outnumbers her sisters who still dare show their faces.

Although individuals may still thrive in spite of it, the veil profoundly affects habits and attitudes. Many veiled female students have largely lapsed into becoming silent note-takers, are increasingly timid, and are less inclined to ask questions or take part in discussions. This lack of self-expression and confidence leads to most Pakistani university students, including those in their mid- or late-twenties, referring to themselves as boys and girls rather than as men and women.

While extremism and social conservatism do not necessarily lead to violent extremism, they certainly do shorten the distance. Such minds are more easily convinced than others that Muslims have been demonized by the rest of the world. They are also more easily blinded against facts that actually exist – such as the violence inflicted by Muslims on other Muslims. The real problem, they say, is the plight of the Palestinians, the decadent and discriminatory West, the Jews, the Christians, the Hindus, the Kashmir issue, the Bush doctrine, etc. Pakistanis under the Saudi spell vehemently deny that those committing terrorist acts are Muslims and, if presented with incontrovertible evidence, brush it away as reaction to oppression.

The result has been civil war. Presently, Pakistan is fighting a full-scale war in FATA, North Waziristan, and other “wild” areas of Pakistan. This has resulted in an estimated 60,000 deaths between 2004 and 2016. On 16 December 2014, the TTP (Pakistani Taliban) slaughtered over 122 children of army officers and burned alive their teachers in an attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. In January 2016, it again attacked the Bacha Khan University in Charsadda, killing twenty students and a professor.

The suicide bomber and the masked abductor have massively impacted upon Pakistan's urban life and its national economy. Soldiers, policemen, factory and hospital workers, mourners at funerals and ordinary people praying in mosques have all been reduced to globs of flesh and fragments of bones. But, perhaps paradoxically, in spite of the fact that the dead bodies and shattered lives are almost all Muslim ones, few Pakistanis speak out against these atrocities. Nor do they fully approve of the army operation against the perpetrators of these acts because they believe that they are Islamic warriors fighting for Islam and against American occupation. Terrorism, by their definition, is an act only the Americans can commit.

How did Pakistan arrive in this peculiar mental state where all responsibility is pushed off to external actors? Although Islamic terrorists proudly take credit for committing an atrocity, almost invariably television and

press analysts squarely blame it on some conspiracy hatched by *yahood* (Jews), *hanood* (Hindus) and *nisar* (Christians)? Clearly, the answer is that people have been given a fatal overdose of Saudi-style religion.

Twenty-five years ago, the Pakistani state used Islam as an instrument of state policy. Prayers in government departments were deemed compulsory, floggings were carried out publicly, punishments were meted out to those who did not fast in Ramzan, selection for academic posts in universities required that the candidate demonstrate a knowledge of Islamic teachings and jihad was declared essential for every Muslim. Today, government intervention is no longer needed because of a spontaneous groundswell of Islamic zeal. The notion of an Islamic state – still in an amorphous and diffused form – is more popular now than ever before as people look desperately for miracles to solve their problems. Across the country there has been a spectacular increase in the power and prestige of the clerics, attendance in mosques, home prayer meetings (*dars* and *zikr*), observance of special religious festivals, and fasting during Ramadan

What prompted the Pakistani state in this direction? Was it a search for legitimacy, an urge to further differentiate it yet further from India, or a sincere desire for pan-Islamism? In the usual Marxist analysis, Islamisation of state and the polity was supposed to have been in the interest of Pakistan's ruling class – a classic strategy for preserving it from the wrath of the working class. Whatever the real reason, the amazing success of the state ultimately turned out to be its own undoing. Today, it is under attack from religious militants. Ironically, the same army – whose men were recruited under the banner of jihad, and which saw itself as the fighting arm of Islam – today stands accused of betraying Islam and is almost daily targeted by Islamist suicide bombers as agents of the West.

Pak-Saudi Military Nexus

In December 2015, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced plans for creating a military alliance along the lines of NATO. This came in the backdrop of KSA having failed to deter the United States from pursuing a nuclear deal with archrival Iran. Pakistan has been roped into this thirty-four country all-Sunni Saudi-led effort albeit somewhat reluctantly and after first denying that it was part of the alliance. Adel al-Jubeir, the Saudi Foreign Minister, and Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the deputy crown prince and Defense Minister, traveled to Islamabad one month later to meet the civilian and military leadership.

The relation between Pakistan and KSA goes back many decades. Former Saudi intelligence chief Prince Turki bin Sultan was on the mark when, speaking about Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, he said: "It's probably one of the closest relationships in the world between any two countries."¹² Both countries are Sunni and conservative; both have ruling oligarchies (though one is dynastic and the other military). They were the first to recognize and support the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Their respective relationships to the U.S. share a strong similarity: Pakistanis and Saudis strongly resent what they see as a master-client relationship. Pakistan has a long history of dispatching its soldiers to protect the Saudi royal family and its interests. Thousands of Pakistani troops were garrisoned there in the 1980s and during the 1991 U.S.-led Gulf War. In 2013, KSA proffered a "gift" of \$1.5 billion to ease Pakistan's balance of payments crisis.¹³

In the 1970's, major funding for Pakistan's nuclear program had come from Saudi Arabia; it is said that suitcases of cash were brought into Pakistan from Saudi Arabia (as well as Libya). In gratitude, Bhutto renamed the city of Lyallpur as Faisalabad (after King Faisal of Saudi Arabia). The Pak-Saudi-U.S. jihad in Afghanistan was to further cement Pak-Saudi relations. Madrassas belonging to the Wahabi-Salafi school of thought exploded in numbers and enrolment. After India had tested its bomb in May 1998 and Pakistan was mulling over the appropriate response, the Kingdom's grant of 50,000 barrels of free oil a day helped Pakistan decide in favour of a tit-for-tat response and cushioned the impact of sanctions subsequently imposed by the U.S. and Europe.¹⁴ The Saudi Defense Minister, Prince Sultan, was a VIP guest at Kahuta, where he toured its nuclear and missile facilities just before the tests. Years earlier Benazir Bhutto, the then serving prime minister, had been denied entry. Pakistani leaders, political and military, frequently travel to the Kingdom to pay homage.

The quid pro quo for the Kingdom's oil largesse has been soldiers, airmen, and military expertise. Saudi officers are trained at Pakistan's national defense colleges and the Pakistan Air Force, with its high degree of professional training, helped create the Royal Saudi Air Force. Pakistani pilots flew combat missions using

Saudi jets against South Yemen in the 1970s. Saudi Arabia is said to have purchased ballistic missiles produced in Pakistan.

In early 2015, the Saudis requested Pakistan to join it in fighting allegedly Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. In its attempt to rally Sunni support, the Kingdom wants the Yemen war to be seen as a doctrinal issue. Iran today is challenging Saudi hegemony in the Middle East. It is an insurrectionary, revolutionary power while Saudi Arabia wants the status quo. Iran's mullahs openly call for the overthrow of all monarchies. In their political model the Iranian clergy holds the reins of power, with some marginal space allocated for the expression of popular opinion. But any political freedom, no matter how small, is anathema to the Kingdom. It is deeply alarmed that Iran's support for the Palestinians, and its staunch opposition to US-led wars in the Middle East, has resonated with Arab public opinion even in Sunni majority countries.

Given Pakistan's past obedience, Saudi Arabia was quite shocked when Pakistan's Parliament unanimously voted in April 2015 to decline a military role in the coalition. Worn out by an internal Taliban insurgency that has claimed upwards of 60,000 lives, and wracked by a series of targeted assassinations and bombings of Shia mosques, the country was in no mood for a potentially disastrous overseas adventure. It was overstretched at home and unwilling to pick sides between a "brotherly" Saudi Arabia and a "neighborly" Iran. Tension with Iran would be bad on several counts especially since the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, which has been largely constructed, could greatly reduce Pakistan's severe energy deficit. Moreover, with a twenty to thirty percent population of Shias, it cannot afford yet more killings carried out by Saudi supported Sunni groups.

Interestingly, the only street demonstrations in support of joining the Saudi-led coalition were by the officially banned violent sectarian-militant group, the Sipah-e-Sahaba, now rechristened as Ahl-e-Sunnat-wal-Jamaat. Long the recipient of Saudi benevolence, ASWJ blasted the parliament's decision and staged public rallies urging Pakistan's intervention in Yemen.

Expectedly, the GCC Arabs were in no mood to listen to lame excuses from a dependent country. Employed mostly as domestic help, wage laborers, construction workers, and restaurant employees, millions of Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Nepalese and Filipinos in the Gulf sustain their families back home by scrimping and saving their precious riyals. This left UAE's minister of state for foreign affairs, Dr. Anwar Mohammad Gargash, flabbergasted: how could one such country actually dare to choose neutrality in an "existential confrontation" with Iran. Pakistan, he threateningly said, would "pay the price".

Arab anger at Pakistan is partly understandable. Nawaz Sharif and his government had given the Arabs an impression that his country stands at their beck and call. So, on the one hand, they pampered the egos of Saudi despots and gratefully accepted their favors, including the mysterious "gift" of \$1.5 billion dollars in March 2014. Was there to be no quid pro quo? Then, various Pakistani leaders raised Arab expectations further with loud declarations promising to "shed every drop of our blood" for the defense of *Haram-ul-Sharafein* (keepers of the holy places) when, in fact, no Muslim holy site was ever threatened. But, when it came to putting boots on the ground in what would be a long-drawn bloody civil war, they had backed off.

To soothe an irritated Saudi septuagenarian monarch and his angry princes, an entourage consisting of the prime minister, chief of army staff, minister for defense, foreign secretary, and an assemblage of high officials went hoping that their contrite expressions could somehow calm Arab anger. There was no indication of success.

Pakistan's "disobedience" might have been more forgivable had it not come at this particular moment, when the Saudis are already in a state of fury over the action of their long-time ally, the United States. A preliminary Iran-US nuclear deal, which the Kingdom has long feared and opposed, has already been signed. Although staunch anti-Iran and pro-Israel Republicans in the US Congress strained every nerve to block it, President Obama succeeded in pushing through the final version in 2015. The Saudi nightmare remains that an Iran-US rapprochement will accept Iran as a threshold nuclear state, and end US-imposed sanctions. Iran would then appear as the victor, giving a big blow to the Saudi-led Sunni coalition, of which Israel is an honorary member.

Pakistan eventually did join the all-Sunni thirty-four country Saudi-led alliance in early 2016. But it has not participated – at least openly – in the Saudi war on Yemen. While it fears Saudi anger, it knows that kicking out Pakistani workers is not a realistic option for the Kingdom. Nationals of all Gulf countries live in a work-free country and are hopelessly poor in skill and working habits. Moreover they are in no hurry to change – it remains to be seen whether the oil glut and drop of prices will significantly impact that. Without an adequate supply of hard-working and underpaid servants, every petro-country would grind to a halt.

A second reason also sharply limits the strength of Saudi reaction. Pakistan is the only country that can, at short notice, potentially provide the Kingdom with nuclear weapons, or with a nuclear umbrella. Of course, Pakistan would be wise in not even considering such a possibility. But the fact is that there are no other nuclear vendors in town – and the Saudis know it.

Conclusion

In allowing itself to becoming ideologically enslaved by the most retrogressive force in the world, Pakistan has done itself enormous damage. The resulting cultural climate has allowed the growth of extremism in its madrassas, mosques, colleges, and universities. Today the Pakistani army and state are being attacked by the products of these urban institutions and so dropping bombs on the tribal badlands of FATA and North Waziristan is unlikely to produce more than just a temporary respite.

It would be tragic if Pakistan should surrender its rich and diverse cultures to oil-rich bedouins who consume ferociously, produce nothing, read nothing, and despise art and beauty. It is all the more astonishing that ultra-religious Pakistanis should revere those who have systematically destroyed the sacred sites of Islam, erected hotels and shopping malls in their place. Instead of imagining a cultural connection that does not actually exist, Pakistan needs to look to its actual roots. As heirs to the ancient civilizations of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, its younger generations must be told of their magnificent heritage.

Ah, but this needs a very different mindset! It is one that had existed in many Muslim societies and was articulated by countless Sufis, mystics, and bards. Iran's famous poet, Shams of Tabriz (1185-1248) put it perhaps better than anyone else:

I am not a Muslim
None may call me Christian or Jew
I am not of the East, nor the West
I am neither of earth nor water
I am not of India or China
I am not of the kingdom of Iraq
I am not of this world nor the next,
not of heaven, nor of purgatory.
My place is the placeless,
My trace is the traceless.
It is not the body nor is it the soul,
for I belong to the soul of my love.
If I should win a moment with You,
I will put both worlds under my feet
and dance forever in joy.
O Shams of Tabriz, I am so drunk in the world
that except for revelry and intoxication
I have no tale to tell.

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