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The State of Social Sciences in Pakistan

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South Asia

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In 1947, when Pakistan came into being, there were only two university departments of social sciences: one in history and one in economics. More departments were established in the 1960s when research in sociology and social work expanded. Although the growth of social sciences was still slow – until 1983 there were only 34 social science departments in all the Pakistani universities – the range of social sciences expanded to include (apart from economics and history) departments of political science, psychology, international relations, social work, and anthropology. The state began employing social scientists in its activities of planning and finance. The government also established research institutions in the fields of economics, foreign affairs, administration, and development economics.

In 1983, there were approximately 16,000 graduates in the social sciences in the country, mostly (97%) employed in the public sector.¹ Very few foreign social scientists were working in Pakistan, and the indigenization of the social sciences was not yet an issue for most Pakistani social scientists in this period.

Development of social sciences departments accelerated between 1983 and 2001. The number of departments in this period rose from 34 to 110 and the number of teachers from 191 to 851. In this growth, economics still figured prominently.

Underdevelopment

Most Pakistani social scientists are dissatisfied with the development of social sciences in the country. In their view, the underdevelopment of this field has to do with the historical setting in which the Pakistani state and society came to be defined in ideological terms. Since the first decade of the existence of the Pakistani state, finance, defence and the constitution comprised the list of priorities. Continual migration of the Muslim population from India to Pakistan, the constant state of war with India, and formidable economic challenges did not allow education and research the attention they deserved. Military regimes, which have dominated the political scene in Pakistan since 1958, and the civil governments, during the intermittent periods, which were supported by authoritarian bureaucracy, reinforced a general sense of insecurity and the need for an ideological identity for the state and society as the only basis of national solidarity.

As an ideological state, regardless of whether it was defined in secular or Islamist terms, Pakistani authorities developed a general fear that freedom of expression and inquiry might lead to disunity and anarchy. They distrusted independent and critical thinking. The solidarity of the state, thus, required submission to an official version of history, society and religion, which came to be known as Nazriyyai Pakistan (the ideology of Pakistan). It was considered the duty of the state, particularly of the Pakistani military and bureaucracy, to defend not only the geographical but also the ideological frontiers of the state.

The politically powerful conservative groups within the state structure of Pakistan also pose themselves as the sole guardians of the Pakistani tradition and its values. They dogmatize culture and religion in their conservative traditional values. Consequently, they support and influence state institutions to discourage scientific outlook, critical thinking, reasoning, questioning of the status quo, challenging traditions and authority. These groups determine the direction of scientific activity and allocation of resources to various disciplines and sub-disciplines in the social sciences.

The State of Social Sciences in Pakistan

Consequently, throughout Pakistan's more than 54 years of existence, education and manpower development never received the priority they have been given in other newly independent countries. It is only since the 1990s that literacy, health, nutrition, and social equality, including gender equality, have been included in the Human Development Index. Defence-related sciences, however, are still on the priority list in the budget allocation. Analysing this state of affairs, Hassan Nawaz Gardezi, a Pakistani social scientist, remarked that '[t]he power structure, which assigns extremely low priority to social indicators and high priority to building atomic bombs and missiles, is seriously flawed. Should not human development be the primary value to guide scientific activity in Pakistan?'

The state of social sciences

In 1988, social scientists at the Quaid-i-Azam University (Islamabad), the Centre for the Study of Central Asian Civilization (Islamabad), and the University Grants Commission, organized a joint conference in Islamabad to discuss the state of social sciences and the causal factors of their underdevelopment in Pakistan. The conference recommended the establishment of the Pakistan Social Science Research Council to promote research in the social sciences. The conference was very critical of the state of social sciences in Pakistan. The following lines reflect the general tenor of this criticism.²

Pakistani social sciences have not made any significant contribution to the cumulative growth of social scientific knowledge. Generally, the social sciences in Pakistan lack theoretical orientation and a theoretical framework. The latter, when indeed used, is not subjected to a critical assessment. A superficial, speculative journalistic style of analysis of political events (political science, foreign policy, international relations), chronology divorced from social science and history, and the rationalization of events on the basis of charisma and individual attributes of political personalities, remain standard traits of Pakistan's social scientists. While some of the speculative, historical and legal-formal analysis has come to the Pakistani social sciences from the indigenous intellectual tradition, abstracted empiricism or hyper-factualism has come from a superficial understanding of Western sciences, both natural and social, through training of social scientists in the West.

The import of abstracted empiricism has been accompanied by the import of research techniques developed in the social sciences in the West, which are not often appropriate for gathering facts in an illiterate society.

Social sciences in Pakistan largely suffer from the twin ills of xenophilia and ethnocentrism: the former emerging from Pakistani society's quest for modelling education on Anglo Saxon intellectual and cultural traditions, and the latter from its indigenous intellectual culture and special circumstances of its emergence as a separate country from India. The latter is particularly

manifest in the teaching and research in the fields of Islamic history and Pakistani studies.

Some Pakistani social scientists have called for an Islamization of the social sciences, which in some sense could be seen as an attempt to indigenize the social sciences, but in another sense they also reflect a particular Pakistani ethnocentrism. Islamic social scientists argue that the modern social sciences and their fundamental epistemology are Western innovations and alien to Islamic culture. Pakistan has adopted modern social sciences as structured and classified in the West. However, the value context in which they operate limits their full acceptance and flourishing in the Pakistani environment. Nevertheless, among the Islamized social sciences, only Islamic economics has achieved some advancement, while other fields like Islamic anthropology and Islamic sociology have not progressed further than a change of labels. The proposed approaches have raised serious methodological questions, because they are developed in normative and prescriptive terms. They do not aim to explain social realities, ignore the question of apparent incompatibility between scientific and religious knowledge, and subordinate the social sciences to religious beliefs.

Furthermore, it is also difficult to speak of social sciences in Pakistan in a collective sense. Each discipline within the social sciences in Pakistan is developing in isolation both in terms of teaching and research. This segmented development has made the scientific knowledge of Pakistani society unbalanced. Development in Pakistan has generally come to be viewed merely as economic development, a narrow and unbalanced view of development of a society.

The participants in the conference found two main causes for the underdevelopment of social sciences in Pakistan. First, bureaucratic, authoritarian, insecure, modernizing and dependent states like Pakistan produce technocratic, apolitical, tame, hyper-factual and empiricist social sciences. Second, the cultural outlook of the religious authorities, though an indirect and subtle factor, generates fears of committing apostasy and heresy, or being condemned for doing so by religious authorities. Researchers tend to avoid public controversy and disapproval. Consequently, the Pakistani social scientists have not played a significant role and have been marginal with respect to the planning process in Pakistan.

Among other things, the conference recommended the establishment of the Pakistan Social Science Research Council to promote research in this field.

The Council of Social Sciences

The Council of Social Sciences (COSS) formally came into existence in June 2000 with a charter that defines it as a service-oriented and autonomous organization of social scientists. It aims to contribute to the building and strengthening of an autonomous community of social scientists and to the enhancement of their knowledge and skills. The Council promotes a scientific way of analysing problems among the citizens of

Pakistan. It aims to advance a pluralistic approach in the social sciences while remaining committed to objectivity, rationality and creativity. More than one hundred social scientists in Pakistan and abroad have registered themselves as members of the Council. The Council offers the following publications:

The State of Social Sciences in Pakistan, edited by S.H. Hashmi (Islamabad: Council of Social Sciences, Pakistan, 2001). It is in fact a reprint edition of the proceedings of the above-mentioned 1988 conference on the state of social sciences. In addition to general essays on the state of social sciences, the book also contains assessments of the development of specific subjects, such as psychology, history, political science, sociology, economics, public administration, international relations, education, Pakistan studies, American studies, and African studies, in the Pakistani universities. The book covers the period between 1947 and 1983. The COSS continuously updates this survey in its Bulletin (see below) and plans to update the book.

Bulletin of the Council of Social Sciences, Pakistan, edited by Dr Inayatullah, Dr Zarina Salamat and Zafarullah Khan. This quarterly bulletin contains reports on the activities of the COSS and of the social sciences in Pakistan. More significantly it reports on the developments in social sciences in Pakistan, listing research programmes, published books and periodical literature. The bulletin is also available on the COSS website.

Notes

1. Statistical data in this essay is from the *Bulletin of the Council of Social Sciences, Pakistan*, no. 2 (2001).
2. See for instance, Dr Inayatullah, 'Social Sciences in Pakistan: An Evaluation', in S. H. Hashmi (ed.), *The State of Social Sciences in Pakistan* (Islamabad: Council of Social Sciences, Pakistan, 2001), 1–68.

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