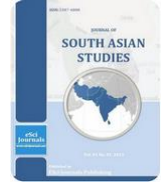




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BookReview

NEW ISLAMIC SCHOOLS: TRADITION, MODERNITY, AND CLASS IN URBAN PAKISTAN

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By Sanaa Riaz, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014. pp. 189. ISBN: 9781137382474. USD 98.06.

The writer Sanaa Riaz, who is an assistant professor of cultural Anthropology at Ashford University USA, studied Islamic education from Pakistan where she undertook the study of traditional and modern Islamic education in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city. She has conducted a profound field research of her subject matter by spending time with families whose children went to Islamic schools and who previously had formal and informal educational background. In this process, she gathered information to understand the concept of Islamic schooling and later compiled it in her book entitled "New Islamic Schools tradition, modernity, and class in Urban Pakistan".

The book has been divided into six chapters; in which author's arguments are three-fold:

The writer contends that the private Islamic schooling has been a growing trend in all Muslim countries—particularly in Pakistan. Private Islamic schooling is not a novel practice in Pakistan given the pedagogical ideologies and politico-historical factors of the country.

Another factor which restricts the parents from sending their children to public or private schools is poverty. So, they prefer to send their children to madrasas owing to free education which is offered in madrasas. However, private Islamic schooling is the unique and first experiment which has gained popularity recently; traditional madrasa-style education is dovetailed with modern secular education, giving rise to a new educational system altogether.

The author seeks to determine the reasons which

brought this new educational system. For this purpose, she conducted interviews with teachers, students of Islamic schools and their families/parents; which revealed that religious, cultural, socioeconomic as well as prevalent class divisions in society were the main factors which prompted most of the Karachiites to enroll their children in new Islamic schools. Therefore, social awareness needs to be spread.

In addition, she puts forth the suggestion that the people of Pakistan have to work hand in hand with the government authorities to develop the current educational system. Most determinedly, she examined the prejudices which private Islamic schools inculcate in their students. The dynamics of educational process and class prejudices have also contributed in creating this school system. She also analyzes traditional, secular and modern concepts regarding Islamic education.

As it is the first experiment of blending traditional madrasa style education with modern western education in private Islamic schools, the author seeks to answer why a need was felt to do such an experiment. In this regard, she examines a primary school textbook at an Islamic school which shows parts of the human body with an accompanying message, 'Allah has given us a body'; something which is not seen in a private school's secular textbook. Similarly, the fifth grade social studies textbook at an Islamic school introduces students to evergreen conifer trees followed by a section stating 'Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) said 'whosever plants a tree, shall earn a house in paradise''. As new Islamic education schools incorporated religious teachings with Western education, which was missing in regular schools, they attracted the attention of those

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parents who were already looking for religious and western education for their children, at the same place.

Furthermore, she briefly sets the prospect of new Islamic education by discussing diversity among the mission and pedagogies of Islamic education. She later describes educational features which impart gender and class ideologies by traditional madrasa's alumni and how they play role by combining with modern secular education across various areas of Karachi. All these issues contribute to new concept of education, which in turn results in class race among various areas of Karachi, ranging from low to high-income; as fluctuating educational policies have modified the concept of Islamic schooling. Moreover, the country suffers on social, political and technological fronts—besides educational. There are several other problems which need attention but the core-issues need to be addressed urgently, says the author.

The book cites eye witness accounts from all fields; it also includes schools after 9/11. Response to the association of Pakistanis, Islamic education changed the policies of education in war against terror. After the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, the US government encouraged former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Pervaiz Mushraf, to do something about madrasas. No one can deny the importance of education; it not only builds a nation, it also becomes a cause of prosperity and gives the direction which leads towards bright future. Therefore, Pakistan should form and adjust its educational policy according to the needs of present times, states the author. The real purpose of education in Islam is to bring peace and harmony among the nation and get close to Allah and act upon the teachings of Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) but unfortunately this essence of education is lacking in madrasas as well as in modern school systems.

It has been evaluated that teaching only Islamic education in private Islamic schools would not bring real change in our society or in the world for that matter; we should focus on cultivating values, and before moving towards values we should keep in mind that each human being has common values regardless of any differences like religion, cultural, race etc. We need to cultivate a tendency to do the right thing, to bring true essence of

education to promote peace, respect happiness in everyone's life and for every moment of life. Regarding the quality education for a prosperous nation, emphasis should be given to female education, the education which draws on the true essence of Islamic education; further selection of teachers should be based on merit of values and character not merely on marks, as communication skills and knowledge are just acquired skills which anyone can acquire at any stage of life; but character goes a long way.

Nevertheless, the book is memorable and powerful, with evidence that Islamic education in Pakistan counterbalances the western propaganda and how this new Islamic education system is compatible with social, professional and urban needs. The writer has been successful in bringing to the world a story previously largely unknown, denied, or ignored. Overall, the book is effective. In today's world, the benchmark for excellence in education so, our children should not be deprived of their basic right to acquire knowledge. Moreover, if a country has a distraught academic infrastructure, the chances to survive in current competitive world are grim. The illiteracy rate in Pakistan is alarmingly high which calls for critical attention. Therefore, we are unable to utilize the brilliant talents of our youth to bring prosperity in the country. Moreover, those students who belong to lower and middle class are mainly considered average students who get jobs for the sake of earning money and not living quality life by using their critical faculties and skills. Parents and teachers overburden their students, make them cram different topics for scoring A's; consequently, quantity takes precedence over quality. Our education policy as well as curriculum should cater to the needs of time. Also, teacher training should be given utmost importance in order to raise a nation which can meet the challenges offered to them in this competitive world. They are not usually able to find teachers who guide them why they are studying and what the purpose of their life is. Furthermore, Islamic education tells us that each one of us is unique and important in his role of life. In short, we need to develop out-of-the-box thinking and broaden as well as diversify the horizon of our education; hence, think globally and act locally.