

Book Reviews

Inayatullah, Rubina Saigol, and Pervez Tahir (eds). *Social Sciences in Pakistan: A Profile*. Islamabad: Council of Social Sciences, 2005. 512 pages. Hardbound. Rs 500.00.

Commissioned by the Council of Social Sciences (COSS), this volume evaluates the seventeen social sciences departments in the public universities in Pakistan for a given set of parameters. The social sciences departments or the topics covered in this volume and their respective authors include: Teaching of International Relations in Pakistani Universities (Rasul Bakhsh Rais); Development of the Discipline of Political Science in Pakistan (Inayatullah); The Development of Strategic Studies in Pakistan (Ayesha Siddiqi); The State of Educational Discourse in Pakistan (Rubina Saigol); Development of Philosophy as a Discipline (Mohammad Ashraf Adeel); The State of the Discipline of Psychology in Public Universities in Pakistan: A Review (Muhammad Pervez and Kamran Ahmad); Development of Economics as a Discipline in Pakistan (Karamat Ali); Sociology in Pakistan: A Review of Progress (Muhammad Hafeez); Anthropology in Pakistan: The State of [sic] Discipline (Nadeem Omar Tarar); Development of the Discipline of History in Pakistan (Mubarak Ali); The Discipline of Public Administration in Pakistan (Zafar Iqbal Jadoon and Nasira Jabeen); Journalism and Mass Communication (Mehdi Hasan); Area Studies in Pakistan: An Assessment (Muhammad Islam); Pakistan Studies: A Subject of the State, and the State of the Subject (Syed Jaffar Ahmed); The State of the Discipline of Women's Studies in Pakistan (Rubina Saigol); Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies (Moonis Ahmar and Farhan H. Siddiqi); and Linguistics in Pakistan: A Survey of the Contemporary Situation (Tariq Rahman).

The parameters of assessment include the changes in the number of departments in each discipline, staff strength over time as well as their qualifications—PhD., MPhil, and MSc, local or foreign, theses written by students, teaching of research methodology, interdisciplinary orientation, journals available/issued to users, quality and number of publications by teachers and students, etc. The evaluation period is 1963-2003. The objective of this study is twofold: to provide an in-depth understanding of a particular discipline and to provide material for developing an overall picture of social sciences in the country. The result indeed is one of the most candid pen-pictures of the state of education in Pakistan's public sector universities. The reader can also feel the anguish of the authors over the state of affairs in their respective disciplines.

It is clearly shown that despite considerable increases in the number of disciplines introduced and the number of teachers in the social sciences, the quality of output ranges from low to average. The academic environment is completely devoid of any debate and development of new ideas. Such an environment emerges from the fact that history, philosophy, and political science, which are important subjects for an understanding of the state, the society, the culture, and the institutions, have seen a fall, while business and administrative education have risen rapidly. This phenomenon is associated with the pressure towards employment-oriented education rather than one that engenders thoughtfulness and reflection. Neither the government nor the private sector is investing in the disciplines neglected. The review of all the disciplines in this book shows that the current environment is not conducive to the development of original thinking, new ideas or innovative concepts. However, the authors of the chapters on Economics and Business Administration appear to be relatively less dissatisfied with the situation in their disciplines.

In the case of Economics, good interaction and research among economists is highlighted as strong points of this discipline. But the research activity reported refers only to the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, or the Pakistan Society of Development Economists based at the same Institute. It is noteworthy that the situation of research in the departments of Economics in public universities is not significantly different from that of other disciplines as described in this chapter. The rapid progress of Business Administration is highlighted by the author, without observing that the universities do not have sufficient full-time faculty. In the Quaid-e-Azam University, for example, some groups of students have only one full day of class (the rest of the week is off) while others are taught in the late hours by part-time faculty.

Thus, recession in the education sector over the past 55 years raises serious concerns about the future of the present generation subjected to this system. The irony is that the relatively less fortunate, who have no choice but to go for public sector education in Pakistan, are subject to this thoughtless process of education.

Development of two subjects, viz., history and philosophy, would train people to ask questions and generate a social critique. Reading the chapter on the discipline of history, for example, one sees how national identity has become the monopoly of the state. The author, Mubarak Ali, describes in great detail how the government uses and abuses history to create a narrow and homogenised sense of identity. As a result, history as it is now simply refers to a dead and useless past; history as a critical social subject arousing debate has ceased to exist. In the case of philosophy, the basic subject that has generated new ideas about all aspects of human existence, the subject has been taken over by new departments that teach how to earn quick profit. The closing down of departments of philosophy has had the effect of shifting philosophy teachers to departments of education and sociology.

It is argued that low wages, limited facilities, large class sizes, and heavy workload leave no time or incentive for teachers to think, explore new areas or develop innovative approaches to their subjects. The majority of the teachers take their profession as any other job, and any research carried out is intended simply to meet the criteria for promotions rather than to generate new thinking or debate on issues. Similarly, the students are mainly focused on acquiring a quick degree leading to a good job with minimum effort. Both the faculty and students appear to be completely devoid of any desire to do in-depth research, or to explore original theses and new ideas.

Almost all the authors in this volume lament the fact that seminars and conferences are quite farcical if judged by international standards. Interaction among faculties and opportunity for students to take interdisciplinary courses are minimal or without content.

The level of facilities in social disciplines is seen to be extremely low. Libraries are ill-equipped both in terms of books and journals, and computer facilities are very limited. All this is mainly the result of very low investments in education in general and in the social sciences in particular. It is evident from this profile that a large number of new disciplines have been introduced in many universities without due consideration to the availability of appropriate faculty and basic facilities. As a result, they are being run largely by untrained though socially influential people with contacts, as in the Defence and Strategic Studies, Women's Studies, etc.

Chapter 18, "Contribution of the NGOs to Social Science Research in Pakistan", by Anwar Shaheen, describes the contribution of the NGOs to Social Science Research in Pakistan. This is an important chapter that shows the role played by NGOs in highlighting the issues facing the society in general and women in particular. It rightly points out that although the publications of these NGOs are not strictly research publications, they play a very important role in disseminating information at all levels. This information is vital in a society like Pakistan where resourceless, powerless people are assumed not to exist. Pervez Tahir, in Chapter 19, gives a detailed account of the expansion of the social sciences departments in Pakistan. However, he also confirms and laments the fact that employment-oriented disciplines have expanded more rapidly as compared to the core social sciences departments.

This volume is a sad but honest commentary on the state of social sciences in public universities. It goes without saying that a systematic policy to curb debate in the society by the ruling classes destroys a nation completely. However, it is important to point out here that the mushroom growth of private universities is following the same pattern. They are focused mainly on job-oriented disciplines; core social sciences are completely ignored. Compared to public sector universities, they have better financing because they charge very high tuition fees; hence they

offer better academic facilities like libraries, internet, and laboratories. Similarly, since they pay well, they pick up the best of the teaching faculty. However, very few private universities have full-time faculty on their payrolls.

This book should be widely circulated, particularly among the policy-makers in the Higher Education Commission. COSS should also commission a similar study on the status of physical sciences, and other disciplines, particularly those being financed by the Higher Education Commission (HEC).

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