Islamic Education in Pakistan

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Abstract
Pakistan combines traditional and modern school systems to provide an array of educational options for the youth of this Islamic country. Its dual system provides many different opportunities for equipping young people with the skills to function in a modern state and for preserving Pakistan’s traditions and culture. However, its dual system also brings disadvantages and perils. Pakistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, with low formal schooling attendance and literacy rates. Some see its system of traditional education as a seedbed for the development of religious radicals and terrorists; this charge is strongly contested by others. Participation rates in all types of education among females remain low, even though the Pakistan constitution promises equality between males and females.

Keywords
Pakistan • Education • Economic development • Terrorism • Gender

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Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the future of Pakistan. Pakistani education must equip the nation’s youth with the skills they require to function in a modern state. At the same time, it must balance schooling applicable to the modern world with Pakistani traditions and culture.

The formal name of Pakistan is the “Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” making explicit that the government and its various agencies, including education, are identified with Islam. Pakistan has two distinct systems of education, a traditional and a modern, but both are based on Islam. Traditional educational can be traced back to the advent of Islamic culture in the seventh century C.E. The modern educational system was inherited from the British and continued after the country gained independence. Both traditional and modern forms of education are supported financially by the Ministry of Education (The Ministry of Education has undergone several name changes. In 2011, it was named the Ministry of Professional and Technical Training; in 2013, it was renamed the Ministry of Education, Trainings and Standards in Higher Education, and in 2014 was renamed the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training.).

Background

Most countries are unified by a common territory, ethnic background, and language, but in these respects Pakistan is severely hampered. In 1947, when India was divided into two states, the intention was to create a Hindu and a Muslim state, India and Pakistan (Harrison et al. 1999; Jaffrelot 2002; Talbot 2012). However, demographics complicated this aim. There was no clear demarcation of Hindus and Muslims, so even though 97% of the Pakistan population was Muslim, millions remained in India. Also, Pakistan was divided into two geographic regions, separated by more than 1000 miles of Indian Territory. These complications led to major political difficulties. Shortly after partition, an estimated 4.7 million Hindus left Pakistan and migrated to India, while 6.5 million Muslims in India migrated to Pakistan (Titus 1990, #707). These migrations caused tremendous social and economic difficulties. For example, the state of Punjab in Pakistan lost 3.6 million and gained 5.2 million other people (SarDasai 2002, p. 1013).

Prior to partition, Hindus had controlled much of the economy, including professional positions, such as educators. Their departure from Pakistan created a vacuum in society. In addition, many highly qualified Muslims migrated to England. The situation was further complicated because right after partition, Pakistan’s economy
came to be dominated by Muslim elites, who had come from India (Weinbaum 1999; Jaffrelot 2002). In addition, Karachi became the dumping ground for immigrants and their presence created a new ethnic designation, muhājjir (immigrants), that persists to this day (Phukon 2002). Finally, during the military crisis in Afghanistan in the late 1970s and 1980s, almost four million refugees moved into Northwest Pakistan; by-and-large they have remained (Hussain 2007; Rastegar 1988).

In 1971, East Pakistan became the separate and independent state of Bangladesh, leaving the western political unit in sole possession of Pakistan state identity. Today, Pakistan is a state consisting of total area of some 796,095 square kilometers (land: 770,875 sq. km; and water: 25,220 sq. km), and population of 201,995,540 (July 2016 est.) of whom some 85–90 are Sunnī 10–15% Shi‘ah and 3.6% other (including Christians and Hindus) (2010 est.) (CIA 2016). Administratively, the country consists of four provinces (North-West Frontier, Punjab, Sind, and Baluchistan); the Islamabad Capital Territory; and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. There are distinct internal ethnic and linguistic divisions. Five major linguistic families with 32 distinct spoken languages are found in Pakistan, including speakers of Punjabi, Sindhi, Siraiki, Pashto, Baluchi, Brahui, and Burushaski (Talbot 2012). These are overlaid by the national languages of English, inherited from colonial times, and Urdu, a Persian language adopted by the elites and spoken as the mother tongue by less than 10% of the people (Phukon 2002). But Urdu is increasingly important and forms the basis of a “national” Islamic language. In addition, Arabic is the language of Islam and is formally expected to be learned by all Muslim children even though only about 8% of the population speak it at home and less than 20% read it (Jaffrelot 2002, pp. 252–253).

The state leaders have asserted a vision of a liberal, moderate, progressive state but have usually tried to achieve it through a repressive military administration. Pakistan inherited a parliamentary tradition from the British, but has not been able to establish a firm parliamentary process. In 1958 the military took direct control of the country by declaring martial law. General Ayūb Khān tried to implement a form of basic democracy, but war with India over the disputed territory of Kashmir interrupted the process. Ayūb Khān’s initiatives were replaced by those of General Yahyā Khān, who worked toward self-government in East Pakistan, further turmoil resulting in a civil war and the complete breakup of East (Bangladesh) and West Pakistan.

In 1971, civilian rule returned to Pakistan under Zulfiqār ʿAlī Bhutto, who introduced socialist reforms and in 1973 gave the country its first constitution that declared Pakistan to be an Islamic state. Bhutto was able to pursue multilateral relations with many countries, both socialist and Middle Eastern, which gave added meaning to Pakistan being an Islamic country (Jaffrelot 2002, p. 105). In 1977 the army once again took over the country under the leadership of General Muḥammad Zia ul-Haq, who tried to establish stronger national unity by further emphasizing Islam in the state and society; he implemented Islamic penalties for breaking laws, such as theft, adultery, and drinking alcohol, and by introducing Islamic taxes such as zakāt (giving of alms) and ‘ushr (10% tax on the produce). With Zia’s death in 1988, elections led to a divided political mandate and ongoing political disruption,
until General Pervez Musharraf re-established military rule in 1999, and held power until 2008, when he was succeeded by Asif Ali Zardari. In 2013 Nawaz Sharif was elected Prime Minister.

Pakistan remains an impoverished and underdeveloped country that has suffered from internal political disputes with Afghanistan and India. The border disputes associated with Jammu and Kashmir are a source of political tensions and even military conflict (Nicholson 2002). In addition, tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan continue and have been exacerbated by the disintegration and degeneration of political and economic institutions in the two countries, while Muslim insurgents expand in number and locations in the region, posing an ongoing threat to further destabilize the situation (Hussain 2005; Paul 2014).

Pakistan faces crucial quality of life challenges. According to UNDP, Pakistan ranks 147 out of 188 countries in terms of its Human Development Index (UNDP 2015). Even though progress has been made regarding literacy, and a constitutional declaration to “remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within [a] minimum possible period.”

While most Western political theorists view formal religious commitments as regressive and even detrimental to national and economic development, Pakistan remains steadfast in its commitment to a religious foundation. The ideal polity, first and foremost, is a community of religious believers in the Qur’ān as well as the written and oral traditions about the Prophet Muhammad. Pakistan’s constitution makes “the teaching of the Holy Qur’ān and Islamiat compulsory,” and the state “promotes unity and the Islamic moral standards,” and secures the proper organization of tithing and alms as well as the maintenance of mosques (article 31).

**Traditional Schooling**

Islam has always placed a high value on education. South Asia was exposed to Islam by Arab traders in the early seventh century, probably while Prophet Muhammad was still alive, and with the arrival of Islamic thinking came attempts to convert Indians to the new religion (Elliot and Dowson 1867). From that time forward, teachers and schools were founded that propagated Muslim beliefs. These schools were largely located in the mosques, where young people met to learn and discuss the Qur’ān.

Traditional schools still receive some government support, although it represents a small portion of their total expenses (Fair 2008). One consequence of the tenuous financial relationship between the private sector and the government is that the government exercises almost no control over most of these schools.

**Traditional Elementary Schooling**

Young Pakistanis attend the maktabs, or Mosque schools, to be instructed almost exclusively in Qur’ān recitation, reading, writing, and grammar, including the
memorization of the Qurʾān in Arabic. Teachers are often lay persons, who possess a range of levels of competence. Maktabās have traditionally been located among the elites and even in royal palaces and these schools included, in addition to the above subjects, social and cultural studies that prepared the pupils for higher education and service in society.

During British rule, almost no colonial attention was given to mass schooling, so whatever education was received among Muslim children was carried out under religious sponsorship. In 1950, shortly after partition only 15.8% (25.7% male, 4.4% female) of young people ages five to nine were attending formal schooling (Ahmed 1984). The government convened the First Educational Conference in 1947 and beyond emphasizing that education should be inspired by Islamic ideology, the government leaders recommended that free and compulsory education be introduced for the first 5 years of schooling (Tahir 1980). However, whatever education was being provided to the broad masses came largely through the maktabās, which continued to be connected with mosques and shrines, and their major mission was to impart elementary religious knowledge. The primary shortcoming of these institutions has been their indifference to modern subjects such as science. Their curriculum has been largely to learn the Qurʾān, although some schools provide instruction in poetry, elementary arithmetic, penmanship, manners, and language (Fair 2008, pp. 17–19). The instructional approach is on reading, memorizing, and reciting the Qurʾān (Boyle 2006). Upon completion of this lower school, children are awarded various types of certificates: naẓīrah (reading); hifẓ (memorization), and tajwīd (recitation) of the Qurʾān.

Traditional Secondary Schooling

At the secondary school level of traditional education, the most prominent institution has been the madrasah. The first madrasahs in the subcontinent of Asia was at Ajmer around 1210 C.E., followed by schools at Delhi and the Muslim center of learning at Badaun. The program of study of these schools was generally the same, concentrating on grammar, literature, logic (manṭiq), Islamic law (fiqh), Qurʾān commentaries (tafsīr), the life of the prophet (sīrah), mysticism, and religious philosophy (Hoodbhoy 1998).

It is to the credit of Muslim schools at that time that they became the repositories of the greatest stores of knowledge in the world (Guenther 2006). Their scholarship was without equal. Their libraries were exceptional. They excelled not only as centers of Islamic learning but as centers for grammar, poetry, literature, logic, mathematics, philosophy, natural science, and other disciplines (Anzar 2003). However, by the fifteenth century a bifurcation began to develop, when the madrasahs, at least in the Asian subcontinent, split from other schooling options by eliminating the “earthly sciences” of their programs in favor of a purely Muslim-oriented program of study (Hoodbhoy 1998).

This was the situation, when the vast Muslim empire was taken over by powerful political forces from the West. Even though the major motive of the West was
economic, trade opened the way for Christian missionaries, who introduced a
different kind of educational orientation. Madrasahs firmly opposed the cultural
and educational hegemony of the British rulers, which meant that they focused
almost exclusively on the teachings of Islam as prescribed by the Qur’ân (Anzar
2003).

A credible estimate of the number of madrasahs in Pakistan remains unreliable,
except for those registered under the control of some central board. A central board
determines the syllabus as well as collects registration and examination fees. In
addition, it oversees examinations and distributes the results thereof. Five major
madrasah central boards have operated since partition. At the time of independence,
there were 137 madrasahs registered in Pakistan. By 1987, there were 2862 regis-
tered institutions. In April 2002, the Minister of Religious Affairs put the figure at
10,000, with 1.7 million students (Rahman 2004). Monitors of Pakistan put the
number of such schools at about 40,000 (Stern 2000; Singer 2001; Talat 2013). This
tremendous increase in madrasahs is explained in various ways, which shall be
explored later.

Hoodboy (1998, p. 230) has given an account of the daily routine of one resident
madrasah. A day starts with the fajr prayers, followed by recitation of the Holy
Qur’ân. Regular classes commence soon after breakfast and continue until lunch-
time. There are one or two more classes after the zuhr prayers. Some institutions
allow a siesta period after that. Students are allowed playtime of an hour or so after
the ‘asr prayers. The maghrib prayers are followed by a lesson and dinner. The
students are required to revise the day’s learning after the ‘ishā’ prayers before they
go to bed around 11 p.m. The meals are modest, and the students live, study, and
sleep on the floor together in the same hall, neatly packing off their bedding in a
corner during the day. Teachers have separate quarters. Most of the madrasahs have
their own libraries. Students are often taken out of school to recite the Holy Qur’ân
on special occasions such as funerals.

There are higher forms of madrasahs intending to produce the ‘ālim, or Islamic
scholar and teacher. In Western parlance, the ‘ālim certificate is often seen as
equivalent to a master’s degree in Islamic or Arabic studies. To become an ‘ālim
qualifies one only for work in the religious sector, because these students rarely
engage in studies other than Islamic religion (Anzar 2003).

**Modern Education**

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, during the colonial period, the British
introduced what we now refer to as the modern education system to the Asian
subcontinent. The current system in Pakistan has inherited all the major structural
elements of the colonial educational system and in this way does not differ dramat-
ically in form from most of the European inspired elements. Despite the continuing
presence of traditional education, Pakistani families rely on the modern education
system to prepare their youth to work in the modern world.
Young people who seek a modern education not only attend government-sponsored schools but a wide variety of private schools. Even though most private schools are traditional in nature, if they are registered with the government, they are required to follow the government-prescribed curriculum, including Islamic studies. Many private schools provide the best modern education available in Pakistan (Fair 2008). Many private schools cater to the families of elite Pakistanis and professionals. Some of these private schools are based on the Cambridge system of education, preparing students to take Ordinary-Level and Advanced-Level examinations, thus offering an academic curriculum substantially different than that offered in public schools. High fees have traditionally put these elite private schools out of the reach of most Pakistani families.

Recently, private modern education has expanded greatly in Pakistan. Once mainly available as a high quality alternative for families of means, now a range of private schools of differing quality and prices are available, making them a viable alternative for middle class and even some poor families. It has been estimated that private educational institutions account for approximately 20% of total student enrollments at the modern primary and middle school levels. These educational institutions, all classified as nongovernmental by the Pakistani Ministry of Education, take many different forms. Most are privately owned, commercially run entities, and account for approximately 80% of these institutions. Others are sponsored by international nongovernmental organizations or community-based groups (Laumann 2000). Although nongovernmental schools have a stronger presence in urban areas, accounting for about two thirds of private school enrollment, they also reach rural areas, which account for the remaining third.

As in many countries, the public school system consists of several stages: preprimary, sometimes referred to as kachi or nursery, which may begin for children as young as 3 years old; primary, five grade levels; middle school, a three-year phase consisting of grades six through eight; a two-year secondary school or matriculation stage, grades nine and ten; a two-year higher secondary or intermediate college; and higher education, including colleges and universities in which students earn baccalaureate, professional, master’s, and doctorate degrees. Students at colleges usually concentrate on two or three subjects, but they must take additional courses in English, Pakistan studies, and Islamic studies.

When partition took place there was only one university in Pakistan, but the number of institutions has multiplied. In the early 1970s, all institutions were nationalized under Bhutto and they remained state-run for the next decade. This arrangement did not result in a satisfactory participation rate, so in the mid-1980s private institutions were again allowed to operate. In 1991, there were only two private institutions of higher learning, but by 2005/06 this number had increased to 56, and to 74 in 2015 (Khattak 2016). Even with this rapid growth, higher education in Pakistan remains underdeveloped.

The basic language of instruction in most elite schools is Urdu, although some schools use Sindhi; Usually English is taught only beginning at age 10 as a foreign language. In the last decade, the government of Pakistan has made it a goal to increase English instruction and begin offering it at an earlier age, but it has
been hampered in its attempts to recruit enough qualified personnel. Currently, the Ministry of Education is sponsoring special initiatives to introduce English teaching from the first grade. Both Urdu and English languages are still highly linked to social class.

The government of Pakistan also sponsors some English-medium Model Schools in urban centers. These schools are much in demand and select students based, in part, on entrance exams. The Pakistani military forces also run some schools to accommodate the children of military personnel (Riaz 2014).

Vocational education exists in Pakistan and takes many forms. Some career tracks, such as carpentry, have only minimal basic education qualification requirements, while some more highly technical trades, such as computers, require the completion of some secondary education.

Students take state-administered high-stakes exams at certain points in their educational careers. At the completion of secondary school, students are required to sit for board examinations. Approximately one-third of examinees pass. They may opt to continue on to higher secondary school or intermediate college, after which they again sit for exams for the Higher Secondary School; approximately one-third of examiners pass.

The Pakistani government has issued a number of reports on education, beginning with the National Education Conference report in 1947, the first year of independence from direct British, and the latest one, Pakistan Education for All Review Report (2015). Although these documents vary in quality and rhetoric, Tariq Rahman (2004) finds three prominent and sometimes contradictory goals in all the major documents: one of the goals is to use Islam and Pakistani nationalism to prevent ethnic groups from breaking away from the center and to build a modern, cohesive nation.

Critical Educational Issues

According to Pakistan’s constitution, the state has an obligation to provide education to all citizens (Article 37, f). While Pakistan has publicly committed itself to universal primary education and adult literacy, the country has not been able to deliver on these promises. The best education in Pakistan may be compared with similar institutions in the West; however, the educational system has come to be characterized by its many shortcomings and perceived failures. More than six million children (aged 5–9 years) have no access to formal primary education of any kind, and only half of the children who begin school reach grade five (Mujahid-Mikhtar 2006).

Pakistan has low literacy rates. In 2013, UNICEF indicated that 79.1% of male youth (15–24 years) were literate, while 61.5% of females the same age were literate (UNICEF 2015). These figures are up from a decade ago, when the gap between male and female literacy was substantial: 66.25% for males and 41.75% for females. Literacy levels vary greatly by region as well; there is a 60.8% literacy rate in Punjab and 34% in Baluchistan.
Military tension with India and general national security needs have contributed to relatively high military and relatively low educational spending. In 2002, Pakistan’s public expenditures allocated to all levels of education increased from 2.6% in 1999 to 3.3% in 2010. Less than 10% of government spending is for education (UNESCO 2015).

**Islamic Education and Religious Radicalism**

Major questions, post 9/11, have been whether attending the *madrasah* leads to militant behavior and whether increasing the length of schooling reduces militant behavior. Studies have been conducted in Lebanon, Palestine, and elsewhere in the Middle East that suggest the possibility of such relationships, at least regarding individuals who participate directly in terrorist activities (Berrebi 2007; Krueger and Maleckova 2002; Hassan 2001).

In Pakistan, Christine Fair surveyed 141 families, each of which lost at least one son to militant actions in Kashmir and Afghanistan, and she found that only 19 young men were reportedly recruited from a *madrasah*, while an equal number were recruited from a public school and none from a private school. At least 50 were recruited from friends, 32 at mosques, 27 from proselytizing groups, and 19 from relatives (Fair 2008, p. 68). Fair also found that those who participate in militant activities also tend to have relatively high levels of schooling. For example, 58% of the young men in her sample had completed at least 10 years of schooling, while the average male in Pakistan had completed less than the sixth grade (ibid.: 69).

Although Fair found that only a small number of militants came from the *madrasah*, she is concerned that under certain circumstances education in the *madrasah* may encourage terrorism or militant activity. Rastegar (1988) found that certain *madrasahs* in and near refugee camps located near Afghanistan and Kashmir became training grounds for young militants who would dedicate their lives to the liberation of these two areas. According to Rastegar, these schools failed to provide the traditional curriculum but became part of the political mobilization process by distorting concepts such as *jihād* (striving and struggling in the face of persecution) and turning that concept into one of struggling against any enemy through violence and vengeance.

In the 1980s, the administration of General Zia ul Haq tried to Islamize the state and society, and the traditional *madrasahs* underwent a dramatic change. Funds were appropriated through religious tithes (*zakāt*) and used to encourage the establishment and development of *madrasahs* (Jones 2002, pp. 31–32). These increased resources were enhanced by major contributions from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States. Because the program of studies of *madrasahs* has not been overseen by the state, their school’s leaders have able to decide who to take in and what to teach. The assumption on the part of state authorities was that these schools would follow the pattern of traditional secondary education and that occurred in the vast majority of cases (Andrabi et al. 2006). Ironically, while traditional education has often been blamed for the slow rate of economic and political development in Pakistan, it is also
seen by some as a possible key to tap into Pakistan’s potential. UNESCO, for example, declared in 2005 that madrasahs could make an effective contribution to national development efforts if the teachers could become better.

The Contested Question of Islamic Education among Women in Pakistan

The constitution of Pakistan promises equality for all citizens, and explicitly states, “there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone” (Article 25: 2). The same document extends this guarantee specifically to education: “The state shall provide basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education and medical relief, for all such citizens, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race” (Article 38: d). In spite of this, “gender parity remains a distant prospect” for Pakistan (UNESCO 2003), and this assessment had not changed by 2015. Although overall enrollment rates have increased dramatically over the past 60 years, the gender gap persists (Jalil 1988).

Authorities often assign blame for low rates of girls’ enrollment at the primary and secondary school on parents placing low value on female education. However, many scholars feel parents are willing to send their girls to school under the right conditions. Scholars such as Farah and Shera (2007) and Heward (1999) argue that schools must be free and of decent quality, located near their homes, and staffed by teachers the community can trust, preferably women. Despite growing awareness of the importance of education, attitudes deeply rooted in the traditional Islamic structure of family, gender roles, and power towards female education have been slow to change (Farah and Shera 2007; Weiss 1998).

Islam is thought, especially by non-Muslims, to restrict girls’ access to education (King and Hill 1993). Indeed, gender inequalities have been a part of Pakistan since its inception and many scholars suggest that Muslim values account for a part of this inequality. According to Lisa Laumann (2000, p. 98), “women have been constructed as legal minors, economic dependents, political appendages, and objects of social protection in the contentious struggle over Muslim communal identity...”

However, Coleman (2004) challenges this, stating “Islamization is clearly not the reason for Pakistan’s low female literacy rates” and that “most Islamists are careful to stress their support for female education.” She offers a more indirect effect, stressing that religious leaders’ emphasis on a traditional role for women and the need to protect women’s honor reinforces cultural norms that limit female mobility and access to the public sphere, compounding the already large challenges of getting and keeping girls in school. Others argue that cultural practices sometimes curtail women’s rights guaranteed by Islamic law and that girls’ enrollment rates are a reflection of restrictive and often misleading interpretations of the status and role of females according to Islam (Farah and Shera 2007).

Throughout its brief history, Pakistan has articulated strategies to grapple with these educational imparities. The framing of education goals changed in 1992, when for both male and female education documents began to recognize education
as a right, influenced by global ideals expressed in the Education for All movement (ibid.). International efforts have reinforced Pakistan’s attempts to bring about greater gender and education equality. Few doubt the importance of achieving educational parity, even though some scholars challenge as simplistic the above conventional portrayal of the benefits of educating girls (Hannum and Buchmann 2003). Pakistan has repeatedly expressed the ambition to achieve the goals mentioned, however, has been unable to match these goals with the financial resources to achieve them (Farah and Shera 2007; Heward 1999).

In July of 2007, the Pakistani government besieged the Lal Masjid in Islamabad, after students and clerics agitated against President Musharraf’s government through a variety of public disturbances in favor of imposing shari‘ah. The siege ultimately ended with a death toll over 100 after military forces stormed the mosque and the attached female seminary Jamia Hafsa (BBC 2007). According to Saini’s analysis of the Pakistani military operation, “the Lal Masjid was widely known to be a center of radical Islamic learning” (Saini 2009, p. 554). News coverage of the incident, in particular, focused on the actions of Jamia Hafsa’s female students as they represented a heretofore uncommon phenomenon in Pakistan: a significant number of women from a female madrasah, politically and publicly engaging in movements against the government. Most of the students attending Jamia Hafsa came from rural areas, and in particular the North West frontier provinces. In July 2005, the women defended Lal Masjid against a raid by Pakistani special forces who were investigating suspected links between the mosque and bombings in London (BBC 2007). In the months leading up to the siege, the women shut down several movie stores and massage parlors for promulgating “decadent western values” (ibid.). Perhaps the most high-profile demonstration carried out by the female students was in response to government demolition of mosques that had been illegally constructed on government land. As demolition began, the students occupied a children’s library near the mosque with intent to “fight to the death” once the government threatened eviction.

The Lal Masjid incident, a confrontation between students and the Pakistani government at the Red Mosque, and reactions to it, brought the female madrasah education in Pakistan and the role of Islam in Pakistani to the forefront of debates and contentions.

The siege of the mosque, and in particular, the involvement of Jamia Hafsa’s female students, both in the disruptions leading up to the siege and in the siege itself, raised the need for a more in depth understanding of female madrasah education in Pakistan. Conflicting reports emerged about the role of Jamia Hafsa’s female students in the siege. Some news outlets used claims made by the Pakistani government to depict the women as hostages forced to stay in the madrasah against their will (Masood, New York Times, July 13, 2007). However, the actions taken by the women leading up to the siege suggest at least partial willingness by female students and teachers to participate in the resistance to the Pakistani government.

Thus, given the complexity of the potential sociopolitical influences over female education in Pakistan and their effects on the position of women within Pakistani
society, understanding the madrasah as a legitimate source of education for females becomes essential.

The effect of increased politicization of women’s rights and empowerment in Pakistan, different theories of feminism, and its relationship to education were emerged to consider the role of female madrasah education. Women, especially in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, have been identified as key actors in progressing development in the third world.

In her examination of female madrasa education at Madrasatul Niswan in New Delhi, India, Marieke Winkelmann discusses how female madrasah education affords its students a degree of social mobility that works within Muslim community in India. Winkelmann concludes that although she went into the project looking for women’s emancipation within Islam as produced by education, she found that empowerment itself proved to be a problematic tool for analysis (Winkelmann 2005). This raises concerns about the control the male officials exert over the female madrasah, particularly in the partial curriculum on Islamic law. However, in reference to Mahmood (2001), Winkelmann recognizes and argues that the education in the schools on the subjects of Qur’ān, Islamic upbringing (tarbīyah), Arabic, Urdu, and even the partial exposure to Islamic law (fiqh) has benefits for the students, namely upward social mobility in a context where religious ties are strong.

Conclusions

Pakistan combines its traditional and modern school systems to provide an array of educational options for the people of this Islamic country. Such a tradition brings disadvantages and perils with it, as well as provides tremendous opportunities. Economically, Pakistan is one of the poorest nations in the world. It has become a nesting place for militant fundamentalists. In spite of stated ideals, it fails to provide its citizens with the educational opportunities that human rights demands. However, if the potential of the country and its culture can be channeled appropriately Pakistan might be able to set a model of Islamic growth and productivity both economically and spiritually.

References


