

Teaching Hatred A Glimpse into Pakistan's Education System

Background

- Beginning in 1979 and continuing into the early 1980s, Pakistan's education system became increasingly Islamicized and intolerant under the guidance of General Zia ul-Haq.¹
- The drive to alter the education system under Zia led to a coalescence of Islamic religious content and non-religious content in public school textbooks. For instance, the current curriculum and textbooks for grades 1-3, "often integrate Urdu, Social Studies, and Islamic Studies into one textbook." Similarly, an examination of the first grade textbook found that seven out of 16 chapters contained Islamic sermons.² Moreover, in the accompanying instructions, teachers are instructed to emphasize the curriculum's Islamic content.³
- Several studies on Pakistan's education system have found inherent biases towards minorities in government approved textbooks. For example, a study managed by two British-Pakistanis indicated that social science and history textbooks contained "disturbing" themes such as "Pakistan is for Muslims alone," "[t]he world is collectively scheming against Pakistan and Islam," and "Muslims are urged to fight Jihad against the infidels." The study also said that textbooks portrayed Hinduism as an inherently iniquitous religion: devoid of equality.⁴
- Although revised curriculum guidelines were proposed in 2006, the textbooks never incorporated the new guidelines, and as a result, continue to contain Islamic content and negative and inflammatory depictions of minorities. Radical groups, such as Jamaat-e-Islami, as well as conservative political parties have consistently opposed attempts to reform textbooks.⁵

Government Sponsored Textbooks/Curriculum

- In 2011, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released a comprehensive report on Pakistan's education system. The report utilized a study conducted by the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (ICRD) and the independent Pakistani think tank, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), which reviewed more than 100 textbooks from grades 1 through 10 from Pakistan's four provinces.⁶
- USCIRF's report found that social studies textbooks were rife with negative comments regarding India and the West, with Hindus particularly singled out for criticism. Specifically, Hindus were

¹ Hoodbhoy, Pervez, "Banning a Textbook -- the Punjab government panics," (April 5, 2013), *The Express Tribune*, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/531509/banning-a-textbook-the-punjab-government-panics/>

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ahmed, I., "Pakistan: Do school texts fuel bias?" (January 21, 2009), *Christian Science Monitor*,

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0121/p04s03-wosc.html>

⁵ "Connecting the dots: Education and religious discrimination in Pakistan: A study of public schools and madrassas," (November, 2011), USCIRF,

[https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.uscifr.gov%2Fimages%2FPakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email\(4\).pdf](https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.uscifr.gov%2Fimages%2FPakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email(4).pdf)

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⁶ USCIRF Report,

[https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.uscifr.gov%2Fimages%2FPakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email\(4\).pdf](https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.uscifr.gov%2Fimages%2FPakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email(4).pdf)

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repeatedly described as extremists and the eternal enemies of Islam. Moreover, Hindu culture and society were portrayed as unjust and cruel, while Islam was portrayed as just and peaceful.⁷

- Furthermore, the report noted, “Hindus are portrayed as enemies of Pakistan and Muslims in Urdu and Social and Pakistan Studies textbooks.... Hindus are often singled out as particularly inferior or evil.”⁸ In addition, according to the joint ICRD-SDPI study, “Negative depictions of Hindus are manifested through both historical distortions and the framing of concepts through religious language that promotes the superiority of Islam over Hinduism...”⁹
- Other recent reports on Pakistan’s education system, including one commissioned by the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), reached similar findings about government issued textbooks. For instance, NCJP found that “textbooks teach students that Hindus are backward and superstitious, and given a chance, they would assert their power over the weak, especially, Muslims, depriving them of education by pouring molten lead in their ears...”¹⁰
- Beyond negative portrayals of minorities, the education curriculum promotes extremism and justifies violence in the name of religion. Pervez Hoodbhoy, a well-known Pakistani scholar, who has written extensively on Pakistan’s education system, recently noted that schools in Pakistan encourage views that have been contributing to militancy and terrorism in the country. Hoodbhoy presented several examples, including the use of the alphabet to inspire violent extremism, such as A for “Allah,” B for “bandook [gun],” and J for “jihad.” He also showed images used in Pakistani classrooms condemning items considered “sinful,” such as kites, guitars, chess, carom boards (a popular board game in South Asia), and musical instruments.¹¹
- The following extracts from textbooks currently in circulation in various provinces provide a few specific examples of the inflammatory content taught in public schools:¹²
 - **Grade IV (Social Studies, Khyber Pakhtunkwa):** “Muslims treated Hindus in [a] very good manner despite that Hindus used to main[tain] deep animosity against Muslims.”
 - **Grade V (Social Studies, Punjab):** “The religious beliefs of the Muslims and Hindus are absolutely different. The Hindus worship many Idols. They have many Gods and Goddesses. The Muslims believe in one Allah who is Almighty and who is Creator of the universe. The Muslims worship Allah. In the Hindu religion the men are divided into different classes by their system of caste and creed, whereas in Islam all the Muslims are equal and are brotherly with one another. In Hindu religion the women are given a low status. Whereas Islam teaches to give due respect to the women.”
 - **Grade V (Islamic Studies, Sindh):** “Hindus have tried all their means to harm Muslims of Indian Sub-continent and killed millions of Muslims. They were deprived of their assets and properties.
 - **Grade VI (Social Studies, Punjab):** “Before the Arab conquest the people were fed up with the teachings of Buddhists and Hindus...The foundation of [the] Hindu set up was

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ USCIRF Report,

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⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) report 2008

¹¹ “In Pakistan Schools, ‘B’ for ‘Bandook’ ‘J’ for ‘Jihad’,” (June 25, 2012), The Times of India,

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-06-25/uk/32408419_1_bandook-hindu-muslim-differences-pakistan.

¹² USCIRF Report,

[https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.uscifr.gov%2Fimages%2FPakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email\(4\).pdf](https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.uscifr.gov%2Fimages%2FPakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email(4).pdf)

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- based on injustice and cruelty. The system of Islam, which was based on justice, equality and brotherhood as described earlier, impressed a lot to the Hindu culture and set up.”
- **Grade VI (Social Studies, Sindh):** “The social equality and justice to all freed the cast ridden Hindu society and paved the way for spread of Islam, we know that the low caste Hindus suffered due to the low caste system, The Hindus belonging to lower casts were tortured, insulted and disgraced.[sic]”
 - **Grade IX - X (Pakistan Studies, Khyber Pakhtunkwa):** “Hindu leadership has not only shown their religious hatred but also expressed their political hatred by opposing to celebrate their independence day on the same day. They proposed 15th August 1947, as their independence day because they never wanted to celebrate with Pakistan on the same day and this shows their psyche of narrow-mindedness.”
 - **Grade IX - X (Pakistan Studies, Khyber Pakhtunkwa):** “Hindus were against the creation of Pakistan. Despite their utmost opposition, when Pakistan was created, they used all means to weaken and harm Pakistan. Hindus in the ‘East Pakistan’ started mobilizing their fellow citizens against the ‘West Pakistan.’ ”

Attitudes of Public School Teachers

- In addition to textbooks, public school teachers across Pakistan often disseminate anti-minority sentiments and/or endorse violent extremism in the classroom.
- The joint ICRD-SDPI study referenced above interviewed students and teachers from public schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Balochistan, Sindh, and Punjab. Specifically, 37 middle and high schools were visited, with 277 students and teachers interviewed individually or in group settings.¹³ The majority of teachers interviewed expressed the opinion that religious minorities must not be allowed to hold positions of power, in order to protect Pakistan and Muslims.¹⁴
- The study further found, “All of the (public school) teachers believed the concept of jihad to refer to a violent struggle, compulsory for Muslims against the enemies of Islam. Approximately 90% mentioned only violent struggle when referring to jihad, while the remaining teachers extended the understanding of jihad to encompass both violent and nonviolent struggle....”¹⁵
- Similarly, 80% of teachers interviewed in the ICRD-SDPI study viewed non-Muslims, in some form or another, as the “enemies of Islam.” Moreover, the majority of public school students interviewed viewed non-Muslims as the “enemies of Islam.”¹⁶

Compulsory Islamiyat Classes

- Several government run schools, particularly in Sindh province, force minority students to take Islamic studies classes. Hindu students and other minorities are denied the opportunity to take classes in their own religions or ethics classes, and often struggle in the Islamiyat courses. These schools include N.A. Bechar Government Primary School, also known as Syed Mahmood Shah Gazi and Sindh Madrasatul Islam School, in Karachi.
- Although the education board has technically implemented an alternative ethics course, in reality

¹³ USCIRF Report,

[https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.uscifr.gov%2Fimages%2FPakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email\(4\).pdf](https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.uscifr.gov%2Fimages%2FPakistan-ConnectingTheDots-Email(4).pdf)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the schools and teachers still force non-Muslim students to take Islamiyat classes.¹⁷

- During a Hindu American Foundation human rights fact-finding mission (January 15 - 17, 2013) to Pakistani Hindu refugee camps in Jodhpur, India, Interviews with several Pakistani Hindu refugees confirmed the compulsory Islamiyat lessons in schools in Sindh and southern Punjab. In fact, several parents indicated that they took their students out of schools because there were forced to learn about Islam and read the Koran.¹⁸

U.S. Civilian Assistance to Pakistan's Education System

- Between 2002 and 2008, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) invested nearly \$700 million dollars to reform Pakistan's education system, including modernizing and improving the curriculum and textbooks. Pakistan's Ministry of Education, however, failed to implement significant reforms or remove inflammatory language from textbooks that demonize minorities.¹⁹
- The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009 (Kerry-Lugar Bill) increased non-military aid to Pakistan to \$1.5 billion/year over a period of 5 years until 2014. Education was one of the primary areas of assistance noted under the bill, including for the "development of modern, nationwide school curriculums for public, private, and religious schools."²⁰
- In 2012, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated \$843.62 million to education programming, of which approximately 40% is earmarked for programs in Pakistan and Afghanistan.²¹
- Current USAID education strategy towards Pakistan focuses on building schools, literacy programs, and teacher training. For instance, the National Reading Program (two national projects and one focused on Sindh) aims to improve literacy and numeracy for nearly 7 million children, provide training to over 90,000 teachers in teaching and assessment, and support the development of 3.2 million new readers – including 700,000 children in Sindh. Similarly, USAID's Sindh Basic Education Program, which started in 2011 and will span until 2016, has a budget of \$155 million. No funding, however, has been dedicated to curriculum reform or increasing religious tolerance in public school textbooks.²² It is also unclear whether current teacher training programs address religious intolerance, prejudice towards minorities, or support for violent extremism.

Recommendations

¹⁷ "Minorities Students Struggle with Arabic in State-Run Schools," (April 30, 2007), Daily Times, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007%5C04%5C30%5Cstory_30-4-2007_pg12_3.

¹⁸ Based on several interviews with Pakistani Hindu Refugees (January 15-17, 2013), Hindu American Foundation Fact-Finding Mission to refugee camps in Jodhpur, India.

¹⁹ Gibel, Bryan, "U.S. Aid to Pakistan: The Kerry-Lugar Bill," *Frontline World*, <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/pakistan901/aid.html>.

²⁰ S. 962 (111th): Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009, Govtrack.us, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/s962/text#>; Bajoria, Jayshree, "Pakistan's Education System and Links to Extremism," (October 7, 2009), *Council on Foreign Relations*, <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/pakistans-education-system-links-extremism/p20364>.

²¹ "Where does the Money Go?" USAID, <http://www.usaid.gov/results-and-data/budget-spending/where-does-money-go>; "Education: Opportunity Through Learning," USAID Education Strategy, (February 2011), http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACQ946.pdf.

²² *Ibid*; "U.S. to Improve Reading and Literacy in Pakistan," (April 12, 2012), Embassy of the United States, Islamabad, Pakistan, http://islamabad.usembassy.gov/pr_0412122.html

- Continued USAID funding of education programs in Pakistan should be contingent on the Federal Education Ministry and provincial textbook boards implementing standardized curriculum reforms and working with publishers to print new textbooks that (1) promote religious pluralism and tolerance, (2) remove inflammatory and negative content about minorities, and (3) segregate Islamic instruction from secular subjects. The failure to do so should result in a temporary suspension of USAID's funding of education programs in Pakistan, until verifiable and meaningful steps have been taken to institute reforms.
- The provisions under the Kerry-Lugar bill that provide for the development of Pakistan's school curriculum, as noted above, should be strengthened to include specific language requiring the removal of all discriminatory content from the textbooks. Moreover, any extension of Kerry-Lugar, or any future civilian appropriation bills for Pakistan, should specifically define textbook reform as a major priority and require that certain benchmarks and guidelines for secularizing and revising inflammatory content must be met by the Pakistani government.
- The Federal Education Ministry, provincial bodies, and local school administrations must closely monitor schools to ensure that non-Muslims are not forced to take Islamiyat classes and strictly enforce the provision of separate ethics courses for minorities. Federal legislation should be passed to protect minorities from being forced to take Islamiyat studies classes.
- Current USAID teacher training programs should incorporate sensitivity training to address discriminatory attitudes towards religious minorities and support for violent extremism among many teachers.