Day 1

Thursday 24 April
Inaugural Session: A Civilizational Metaphor

Presentations:
1. Mohammad Waseem, LUMS Lahore, “Cultural Dynamics of Pakistan”.
2. Vrinder Kalra, Manchester University/ LUMS, “Demotic Religious Practices of South Asia”.

The inaugural session was chaired by Syeda Abida Hussain (politician and a former Ambassador to USA). Waseem gave an overview of cultural dynamics of Pakistan from various perspectives. He explained how Pakistan was associated with Indus civilization in terms of antiquity as compared to Aryans in India. After partition, efforts were made to prove that Muslim culture and identity were distinct from their Hindu counterparts. Waseem noted leading traditions in cultural expressions such as poetry, novels, music, dance, paintings architecture, and theatre unfolding themselves through various stages in the last half century.

In Pakistan two dominant trends of defining culture are visible: culture as an independent variable, as a vision, mission, agenda, ideology, identity and commitment; and culture as dependent variable, shaped by geography, history, language, art, gender, region and class. On the one hand, the state has somewhat institutionalized enforcement of Sharia laws. Also, there is proliferation of religious schools (madrasahs). On the other hand, there is rapid growth of English medium schools with a modern and liberal outlook.

Responding to a question from the audience, Waseem stipulated that; emphasis on partition, distinction of Muslim culture and political separatism have been the state’s deliberate agenda in order to legitimise the very creation of Pakistan. Ishfaq Chaudhry argued that the state in Bangladesh sought cultural heritage from Saudi Arabia. “Perhaps it would be wise to look at our own cultures to determine our heritage”. Saeed Shafqat of FC College University commented that the term Cultural Schizophrenia used by Professor Waseem was offensive. However Partha Ghosh was more interested in listening to Waseem’s framework of Pakistan’s cultural dynamics as it put things in perspective.

After Waseem, Vrinder Kalra made his presentation on “Demotic Religious Practices of South Asia”. He explained that demotic was something that exists alongside formal institutional and authority-bound discourses on identity. It is able to deal with multiplicity within any one or other category. He was of the view that “despite continuing dominant discourses of religious belonging and separateness of traditions, the demotic nature of ritual practices in South Asia demonstrate how common practices of worship and idioms of religiosity are maintained across Muslim,
Christian, Hindu and Sikh distinctions.” Kalra stressed that the policies of conducting census in colonial and post-colonial era emphasised religious identities and grossly neglected the overlapping demotic religious practices in the subcontinent. He cited the examples of various activities on different shrines continuing for centuries which do not necessarily fall under the religious tradition. This could be a way to confront religious orthodoxy.

During the question-answer session Neera Chandoke of Delhi University cited some examples of shrines in India where Muslims and Hindu pray together in their own ways. In her view, pluralism/syncretism is the virtue of many shrines across subcontinent. Noman from LUMS questioned the difference between folk and demotic. Kalra responded that his reason of choosing demotic over folk was to remain in the realm of politics.

In her concluding remarks, Abida Hussain said that cultural discourse was dominated by Indus Valley Civilization, ignoring the Pashtun and Baluch traditions because they existed on the periphery of the Pakistani state. In her opinion identities in the Indian subcontinent all conflicted. Customs and religious practices bind people and distinguish them from others. Therefore, a careful understanding of religion and culture is required.

Session 2: Patterns of Religious Conflict

Presentations:

2. Surinder Jodhka, JNU Delhi, “The Sikh Question in India”.

Khalid Ahmad, a famous writer and columnist from an English newspaper Daily Times highlighted the importance of religious decrees ‘Fatwas’ that provided the foundation for Shia-Sunni sectarian conflict in Pakistan. Khalid Ahmad pointed out that fatwas were compiled and printed in India by people who received money from Saudi Arabia which felt nervous about the spill over effects of Iranian Revolution. On the other hand, the Shias in the region had also become active after that revolution. International support for Jihad in Afghanistan and regional impulses resulted in bloodshed between the two communities of Pakistan. Radicalization of ‘Shia’ and ‘Deobandi Sunni’ communities took place as a result of the Afghan war and Iranian revolution. Khalid Ahmad was of the view that Al-Qaida and its outfits are predominantly Sunni (Deobandis) and that it was a very sectarian organisation. He also pointed his finger towards the top intelligence agency (ISI) of Pakistan which was predominantly religious in its outlook. Khalid Ahmad went on to say that sectarian violence in Pakistan had not been limited to Deobadis and Shias. Sunni Brelvi community had also become active in this regard. He also shed considerable light on the pre-partition history of Shias in the Indian subcontinent where the state of Awadh encouraged conversions to Shiism.

Responding to Waseem’s question, Khalid Ahmad pointed out that during the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq, Deobandi Sunnis enjoyed state patronage. The Islamization project of the state needed Deobandis. The phenomenon of Jihad against the Soviet Union further intensified Deobandi militancy against Shias. The situation of sub-sects
of Shiites (Ismailis etc.) in the sectarian violence was also debated at some length in the session.

The second presenter Surinder Jodhka reflected his thoughts on “The Sikh Question in India”. He argued that the discourse of communities in the Indian subcontinent was shaped by colonial administrators with their census policy. They focused on religious classification of communities for effective governance. In postcolonial India, the focus shifted to linguistic identity because it ensured political and economic rights for linguistic communities. In Punjab, Muslims chose to identify with Urdu and Hindus with Hindi. None of them considered Punjabi to be a source of their cultural identity. Only the Sikhs “owned” or made “claims” over the native language of Punjab, namely, Punjabi. Hindus were willing to use Punjabi, but only if it was treated as a dialect of Hindi and was written in the devanagari script. Sikhs, on the other hand, insisted that Punjabi was a fully developed language and had its own gurumukhi script.

The question of language and regional/religious identities was obviously linked to the question of culture and power. Given that the new nation saw it as a legitimate marker of cultural difference, language became a source of political mobilization in post-independence Indian Punjab, where Sikhs had already won the game. By deciding to mobilize their community against Punjabi, and making claims to the national language Hindi as their mother tongue, the Punjabi Hindus had, perhaps quite unwittingly, conceded to the Sikh claim to the region called Punjab. The movement launched by the Akalis during the 1960s for a Punjabi speaking Sikh majority state, the Punjabi Suba, was perhaps only a culmination of the process that began in the late 19th century. Two trends can be observed among Indian Sikhs: to consolidate their Sikh identity and second to uphold plurality which suits them politically.

Waseem inquired about the role of Pakistan in the Sikh discourse. Jodhka answered that it came to the Sikh discourse with the Khalistan movement when Sikhs started thinking about Jinnah’s separatist model and its viability for the Sikh community. However the separatist discourse has almost disappeared from the Sikh discourse. The reason is the upward economic mobility of Sikh farmers and industrialists. The other dimension of the discourse is free movement across borders with Pakistan if and when it becomes operational.

Session 3: Religion, Politics and Society

Presentations:
1. Neera Chandoke, Delhi University, “Justifying Secularism”

Neera Chandoke discussed the role of secularism in the Indian polity and its successes and the question why it needs to be reasserted. For her, secularism as a core concept can be justified in two ways. One, it is possible to revisit history and see how and why the concept of secularism emerged in and for the Indian society. Secondly, secularism can be justified by reference to some basic concepts such as democratic equality. For her, secularism provides political arrangements to allow people, who
belong to different faiths, and who subscribe to their own beliefs, to live together in India with some level of civility. Separatism has not proved to be a viable option for India. There has been a proliferation of identities other than ‘religious’ in the world. The secular doctrine provides space for ethno-federalism, toleration of other religious entities and minority rights in majoritarian systems. Secularism provides opportunities of dialogue with diverse religious groups which would be left out otherwise in non-secular states. Gandhi’s principle of equality of all religions entails that all religions are valid and share the same ethical and moral code. Thus all religions should be treated equally. Although Gandhi failed to negotiate successfully with the Muslim leadership in the 1940’s, the secular India has achieved some success. It has generated space for dialogue among the diverse religious identities of India which is the very basic step to validate other’s identity.

During the discussion session, Ijaz Akram raised the issue of Muslim sentiments in India. He also pointed out the increasing “Saphronisation/Hinduization” of the Indian polity where the existence of non-Hindus had become increasingly difficult. Neera responded by saying that the Indian secular model remained relevant even in the modern context and invited scholarly debate despite incidents of its failure in Indian politics.

The second speaker of the session Amelie Blom presented her thoughts about “Youth and Islam in Pakistan”. In her opinion, urban youth in Pakistan is fast returning to Islam in the light of her research sample. This “rebirth” is attributed to the need of young people to reconcile with religion in the context of modernity. It also provides them an autonomous space, a “soft rebellion” against the dominant norms of society. Another factor behind this re-birth is their quest for dignity and respect. Emotional satisfaction of being religious leaves a pleasing effect on the youth. They describe it as ‘sweet’ experience that brings tranquility, peace of mind and meaningfulness to life. Being religious also provides a spiritual sense of security in an insecure environment. She also observed that many young people become religious after failure in love or a terrible breakup.

Madhulika Banerjee’s paper “Politics and Knowledge: Unani and Ayurveda in India” was presented by Manasa Putnam on her behalf in the workshop. Her paper attempts to outline the two streams of the pre-modern medical knowledge system in India, Unani and Ayurveda, actively present and practiced even today. Unani is associated with Islam and Ayurveda is associated with Hinduism. However, they are hardly mentioned in the contemporary Indian political discourse despite the fact that they were relevant in the colonial discourse. Both medical traditions emerged in different geographical, historical and linguistic contexts, and collaborated with each other in the pre-colonial period for which substantial historical evidence is present. Over time, there gradually appeared a hybrid Muslim-Hindu system of traditional medicine known as Tibb.

However, from the colonial period onwards, there has been a collective consciousness sought to be built by first the Orientalists and then a section of Ayurvedic practitioners that there was active suppression of Ayurveda under the Muslim rule. Orientalists, however, attempted at structuring a newly conceived system of indigenous education, in which Ayurveda and Yunani were associated with the politicised construction of the fate of specific vernacular languages.
The colonial state prioritised modern medicine over these traditional systems and pushed them to the margins to fight for their survival. But the political potential that was inherent in such a development, which could have led to forging of alliances between the Hindu and Muslim politics, could not be realized because the mainstream politics of the two communities had no space for either of these. However, they were sustained at the margins of society.

The post-colonial state continued the policy of privileging modern medicine in allocation of funds and prestige. Under tremendous pressure as it was, from within the Congress, which had a significant constituency of Ayurvedic practitioners, the government had no choice but to keep a small allocation of funds for the ‘Indian Systems of Medicine’. This not only included Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Yoga, but also included Naturopathy and Homeopathy. Ayurveda gained a privileged position in post-colonial India because the Hindu elite and businesses resorted to its promotion. On the other hand, the Muslim elite that would have mooted for an equal position between these systems had migrated to Pakistan. It is concluded in the paper that contemporary developments of the rise of the “Hindu Right” and the force of the market for Ayurvedic medicines may result in the rapid marginalization of Unani in near future.

Session 4: Minorities and Majorities

Presentations:

2. Yogendra Yadav, CSDS Delhi, “ Minority Politics in India: Variation Across Regions”.

Nighat Said Khan elaborated the concept of citizenship in the context of ‘moral’ entity and ‘legal’ entity. The right of equal citizenship was guaranteed in the 1973 constitution of Pakistan. However, after Zia’s Islamization programme was launched in Pakistan a good citizen or a perfect citizen in the eyes of the state was meant to be: male; Muslim; Sunni; Punjabi; and middle class person. All others are ‘others’ who demand their rights from that perfect citizen.

The state resorted to formulating laws which discriminated against minorities. Even the most liberal discourse in Pakistan talks about minorities as if it is a matter of showing large-heartedness. According to this, “we must tolerate minorities. We must give rights”. This is not like respecting the minorities rather it affirms their marginal position in the society.

Hindus living in Pakistan can be divided into two broad categories

1- Upper caste, middle or upper class urban Hindus
2- Lower/scheduled caste, rural, bonded labour (Hari) Hindus
As compared to Christian and Ahmadi (Qadiani) minorities which receive a lot of foreign funding in order to raise voice for their rights, the scheduled caste (lower class rural Hindus) are perhaps the most marginalised minority community in Pakistan. Historically there were no communal tensions there between Muslims and Hindus. But the incident of demolition of Babri Mosque resulted in anti-Hindu riots in Pakistan. The feeling of insecurity among scheduled castes is increasing because the state has not been sensitive to their problems.

Tahir Kamran, of Government College University Lahore presented Yogendra Yadav’s paper “Minority Politics in India: Variation Across Regions”. He argues that “any discussion on the politics of Indian Muslims invites a cluster of conflicting images and stereotypes: images of a beleaguered minority at odds with itself and with the apparent success of democratic India, images of burqa-clad women constituting a vote bank still in the clutches of some clerics or rabble rousers, or the contrary image of the strategic Muslim voters who wield an influence out of proportion to their size and who influence results in a large number of constituencies”. The underlying “unstated assumption is that divisions of region, class, age, gender and caste either do not matter or play a very secondary role in configuring the politics of the Indian Muslims”. He argues that any attempt to understand the nature of politics of the Indian Muslims needs to be located in between the two extremes of assertion of monolithic identity on the one hand and denial of a distinctive identity on the other hand.

Muslims are distributed all over the country in a way that does not provide many areas where they dominate local politics. Except Jammu and Kashmir, there is no other Muslim majority state in the country. In all, there are only about 10 parliamentary constituencies that have a majority of the Muslim electors. Muslims are well below a quarter of the electorate in most other states, except Assam, West Bengal and Kerala. This kind of spatial distribution, combined with the first-past-the-post electoral system, works against the adequate political representation of Muslims. Muslims have been consistently under-represented in the Lok Sabha, the popular chamber of India’s parliament, at around half of their share in population. The Muslim vote is not as fractured as, say, the Hindu vote would be, but it is nowhere close to the image of en-bloc voting. The Muslims resort to en-bloc voting only when faced with a situation of no-choice, when the main competition is between the Congress and the BJP. The Muslim support for the Congress goes down where there is third option or where the main competition is between parties that exclude the BJP or its partners.

There is little evidence to suggest that the Muslim voters go by considerations that they are any different from the rest of the population. As in the case of the rest of the population, it is party which matters first, followed by the candidate and then caste. There is little evidence that Muslim, men or women, are more influenced by clerics or anyone else in deciding who to vote for compared to any other.

The last speaker of the day Ejaz Akram presented his paper titled “Christian Community of Pakistan: Ethnoreligious Dimensions”. 2.8 million Christians live in Pakistan. Their population is roughly equally distributed among the Catholics and the Protestants. Christians are about 3% of the population. The discrimination and violence against the Christians in Pakistan is structural, not systemic. They demand
proper justice procedures in their court cases (especially related to blasphemy laws). The lower judiciary, under political pressure, is quick in giving the strictest punishments to them. However, the upper judiciary sets those verdicts aside. The lower class Christians in Pakistan are subject to adverse socio-economic and socio-political conditions. Relatively upper class Christians are well-placed in society and enjoy upward mobility. But their number is infinitesimally small.

Day 2  
Friday 25 April 2008

Session 5: Religion and Social Harmony

Presentations:

1. Partha Ghosh, JNU Delhi, *Syncretistic India: Social Synthesis, Political Osmosis*
2. Rubina Saigol, Lahore, *The State and Others: Construction of Religious Outsiders in Curriculum*
3. Ishfaq Choudhary, Dhaka, *Role of Education in Preventing Radicalism in Bangladesh*

Partha Ghosh started the day with his thoughts on syncretistic India. Ghosh gave a comprehensive historical account of peaceful coexistence of various religious communities in the country. India became a classic example of syncretism in dance, culture, music, architecture. Rulers at the centre accommodated the local feeling.

Good story about India is that its pluralism has survived for sixty years of the independence. All religions and languages of India lived in harmony with each other for several decades. The agenda of *Hindutva* has changed the scenario. Aspirants of power at the centre are trying to bring religion into politics which had never happened in the past. The incident of demolition of Babri Mosque made people nervous and pessimistic about the future of Indian multi-cultural society. Ghosh portrayed an optimistic picture by saying that Indian cinema (Bollywood) has promoted peaceful coexistence. India will continue to be syncretic in future and there should be no reasons to believe otherwise.

Surinder Jodhka objected that, despite Gosh’s optimism, Gujarat’s anti-Muslim riots were a reality. Urdu continues to be marginalised and India’s picture is not all rosy. Hindi cinema portrays Muslims as terrorists and all such films were commercial successes. Gurharpal Singh raised the issue of consumption trends and its effects on politics. Negative images of Islam are consumed well globally. However, it should be critically considered. Waseem asked: Was India more Hindu now than in 1947? Ghosh replied that social scientists could not be completely objective. Their analyses reflect their biases and prejudices. Ghosh stated that he was trying to give a picture of the coming 1000 years and he felt optimistic about the future of India. Incidents like Babri Mosque and Gujarat riots have not deterred him from being optimistic.

Rubina Saigol presented her study “The State and Others: Construction of Religious Outsiders in Curriculum”. The curriculum in Pakistan’s schools and colleges is used to create national memory. The Indian state is always bashed. In Pakistani textbooks,
partition in 1947 is a joyous moment while in India it is bemoaned. Similarly, 1971 is celebrated in Bangladesh while in Pakistan it is considered to be a conspiracy. Curriculum is used as an identity builder in all countries. Curriculum of Pakistan studies in the state textbooks creates multiple others including Hindus, Christians, Jews and Sikhs. Hindus are portrayed as devils, Sikhs as butchers, Jews as greedy moneylenders and Christians as tricksters and conspirators. However, the Madrassa textbooks are predominantly anti-Western.

Selective forgetting and remembering of the historical facts and events is intentionally done. Detailed knowledge of the other is consistently missing from the textbooks. Self and the other are both mythologised systematically. Hindus are demonised for their caste system. When the partition is discussed, Hindus are portrayed as masculine in the texts as opposed to Muslims who are portrayed as feminine. In a cultural contrast, Hindu architecture is portrayed as narrow, dark and congested as opposed to Muslim architecture which is vast, bright, open and splendid. The Christian ‘other’ appears in textbooks as treacherous who collaborated with Hindus to harm Muslim interests. Jews are almost missing from the textbooks. Sikhs are always portrayed as butchers who hold Kirpan and kill Muslims.

Responding to a question of Amelie Blom Khan, Rubina Saigol said that the textbook writers were not subject specialists. They are people affiliated with the education ministry who write the chapters in books for the sake of money. Therefore logical sequence and explanations are missing from the textbooks and we find extraordinary historical jumps. Emphasis on ideology is the constant denominator in the textbooks. Partha Ghosh inquired about the comparative analysis of madrassa books and government textbooks. It was noted that there were marked differences in the curriculum of the state-run schools, madrassas and private schools.

Ishfaq Choudhary presented his paper “Role of Education in Preventing Radicalism in Bangladesh”. Bangladesh emerged on the global map as a secular nation in 1971. However, certain historical and political developments strengthened the religious elements in the country.

There exist four education streams in Bangladesh namely;
1- Mainstream Education (state-run)
2- Aliya Madrassa Stream (religious seminaries)
3- Quomi Madrassa Stream (religious seminaries)
4- English Medium Stream (private)

An increased emphasis on religious studies in all education streams does not translate into ethical and moral upbringing of the disciples. It is evident from the fact that cheating and use of unfair means in the examinations is increasing day by day.

Islamic radicalism is on the rise. Even liberal political parties have been reluctant to re-secularise the education system because of the growing influence of religious groups. The madrassa education system has been producing young men with radical thoughts. A fundamental reform effort is needed in the education sector of Bangladesh.
Session 6:

In the concluding session of the workshop, Gurharpal Singh presented the findings of the following reports of the Religions and Development (RaD) Programme

- Marginals and the State: Religion, Politics and Governance in Contemporary India
- Religion, Politics and Governance in Pakistan

In his summary of the findings of the two reports, he argued that concern for religion and concern for identity and citizenship had increased in recent years. Failure of the state leads to assertion of religious identities. However, the notions of culture and religion remained marginalised in the field of political science. The Religions and Development (RaD) Research Programme of DFID/Birmingham University is an academic effort to rethink the relationship between religion and development. The “Religion, Politics and Governance” component of this programme was an attempt to investigate the role of Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) in development, their ability to provide services and its impact on good governance. Waseem’s model is based on weak democratisation where state is an independent variable which defines politics of religion in Pakistan. Society is weak while the state is monolithic. Religious formations operate at four levels, namely; organisational, sectarian, educational and iconoclastic. In Pakistan an Islamic establishment has emerged that operates through the state structure. The case study of Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)’s government in the NWFP reaffirms Waseem’s model. Religious political parties have a poor record of good governance. The state shall continue to define the limits of political Islam. However, this model underestimates the radical Islam.

India’s case study “Marginals and the State: Religion, Politics and Governance in Contemporary India” looked at the marginalised communities. Religious communities are not homogeneous. Political mobilisation is based on caste. India’s secularism is taken as non-discriminatory where there is a public role for religious identities. Registration of religion is treated as discriminatory. However, India’s hard realities, along with its pluralist model of governance, should be looked at carefully.

Rubina Saigol; opening the debate on the outputs of RaD components said that “ethnicities are politicised in India”. On the one hand, it is celebrated as the success of India’s pluralism. On the other hand, this approach tends to ignore the more general cross-cutting issues. Neera Chandoke said that issue of class was dominating caste and religion. Concerns about ignoring “Development” and state-centeredness of the project in Pakistan were raised by the audience. However, it was explained that the detailed report answers the questions. In Pakistan, the state has been Islamised.

Waseem’s response was that India’s political model is based on secularism while Pakistan is different. Military rule has relied upon the political use of Islam to legitimise itself. Army entered into an informal alliance with the religious right. For more than six decades, Pakistan is a religious society but religious parties never got the popular vote. It is clear that Islam and Islamisation is not emerging from society or people. It is the project of the state to mobilize the divine sources of legitimacy.

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