

DS Paragraph No 4. 2019

Department of Development Studies

Pakistan Institute of Development
Economics

'DS Paragraph' is an academic activity in which students, researchers and faculty are encouraged to write critical reviews of books based on the Development discourse. The topical range may include academic debates on issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, conflict and human security. The topic of the book reviewed in fourth DS Paragraph is **'Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan'** authored by **M. Ayaz Naseem**. The book has been reviewed by Ms. Samar Abdullah.

Dr. Zulfiqar Ali
Head,
Department of Development Studies

Book Reviewer: Ms. Samar Abdullah (Batch 2018)

Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan

Author: M. Ayaz Naseem

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan

Publishing Year: 2010

The book titled “**Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan**” has eight chapters in which the educational discourse is discussed in terms of gender inequality through largely the lens of post-structuralism. It also deals with the plight of Pakistani women in pre and postcolonial times. This chapter throws light on the role of religion and culture in determining the status of women in Pakistani society. It examines the efforts made by the state in order to provide women better opportunities.

The first chapter titled “**Contextualizing Articulations of Women in Pakistan**” explains the reasons behind the injustice done to women legally, socially and economically. There is a specific mention of the rigid laws made during the dictatorial regime of Zia-ul-Haq. The chapter explains that role of media is discriminatory towards women in Pakistan. It has created an idea of “other” for women. A woman cannot be considered as a national hero because the media always portrays men as national heroes especially in the fields of sports and military. Contrary to the popular narrative, the resistance shown by the women against this patriarchal system is exemplary. Scholars have started writing feminist scholarship since the late 70s which tremendously helped in understanding the problems faced by women in the country.

The second chapter titled “**Michel Foucault and I: Applying Poststructuralism to the Constitution of Gendered Subjects in Pakistan’s Educational Discourse**”, related the term “education” to French Philosopher Michel Foucault’s idea of knowledge and power. It explains how the students are manipulated in the name of discipline and rules. It tells us that there is a strong relationship between knowledge and power. The use of power by the state is common since centuries. The state creates a need for itself to exert power on her citizens. According to the author, the concept of national sovereignty emerged with the course of time due to which certain people and acts are declared anti-national and a threat to the security of the state. This chapter describes the poststructuralist idea of use of space as a power tool. Space can be used to exert power as it was used during the Zia’s Regime in the form of *Chaddar and Chardewaari* (veil and the four walls). It was an effort by the government to confine the women within the four walls of their homes. Another tool for exerting power mentioned in this book is “curricula”. In Pakistan, textbooks are used to disseminate the state narrative among the students in order to control their minds and activities. The curriculum is used to create a discourse which goes in the favor of the state.

In the third chapter titled “**The Education System and Educational Policy Discourse in Pakistan**”, the author discusses the plight of education system in Pakistan. He listed the entities which should be blamed for the inefficiency of the education system. In any country, the politicians, bureaucrats and the intelligentsia are responsible for the inefficient working of the education sector. The role of intelligentsia is to question the apathetic behavior of the ruling elite class towards the most important sector of a country. This chapter shows the complexity and diversity of the education sector. The schools are run by public sector, private sector and NGOs. There is an obvious impact of the location of a school on its quality of education. The quality of education is much better in private schools as compared to the public schools.

In the fourth chapter titled **“Women and State in Pakistan: A History of the Present”**, the author studies the situation of Pakistan through Marxist and Poststructuralist ideologies. He conceptualized the state of Pakistan in the context of British Colonialism. The state of Pakistan has always been sympathetic towards the elite class, which was empowered during the colonial regime and still supported by the colonial masters. A large number of effects of post-colonialism are widespread in the Pakistani society. According to the author, the dominant classes of Pakistan are united in order to save and struggle for peripheral capitalism. In case of Pakistan, the military establishment and Islamic clerics (Mullahs) are considered the most powerful segments of the country. This chapter examines the status of women in the colonial times. The British Government took a number of steps in order to enhance the status of women in United India. On one hand, the colonizers banned the heinous practice of “Sati” and on the other hand they deprived the Muslim women from their right of inheritance. In case of Pakistan, there was no trend of writing of writing feminist scholarship before 1970s. The feminist literature highlights the endeavor of women. This chapter considers the empowerment of Muslims of India as a primary reason behind the partition of India. There are no serious efforts made by the state of Pakistan to ensure the authorization of women. From the beginning, obstacles were put in the way of empowerment of people in the form of racial, social, cultural, linguistic and economic differences.

The fifth chapter titled, **“Subject Positioning and Subjectivity Constitution in Pakistan”**, explains the concept of “religiopoly” in the context of Pakistan. This term refers to a certain discourse which is an amalgamation of religious and militaro-nationalist discourses. These discourses, while having a merger, retain their separate and distinct nature. The regime of General Zia-ul-Haq is the best example of such nexus between the religious and military elements. There is a portrayal of woman as weak, vulnerable and half of a man through the “media discourse” in Pakistan. A binary relationship has been created between the “good” and the “bad” woman. The author tells us that the majority of the dramas produced by Pakistan Television (PTV) portray working women as rebellious wives and irresponsible mothers. The author shows the strong side of the Pakistani women through their involvement in the political struggle and movements.

The sixth chapter titled **“Educational Discourse and the Constitution of Gendered Subjectivities in Pakistan”** focuses on the creation of patriarchal mindset through the use of textbooks. There is an obvious display of patriarchy and gender inequality in the textbooks of Urdu and Social Sciences. The majority of the characters depicted in these textbooks are of male gender. The students while reading such books get the impression that only one gender is worthy of studying and not the other. These books justify and reinforce the division of labor for men and women. This chapter highlights the dominance of men over women in the social, economic and political spheres of life. The stories written in these books depict male characters as fighters, warriors, prophets, scientists etc. On the other hand, these books portray women as mere cooks, cleaners, home makers, care takers etc. Thus there is a clear display of gender discrimination in the curricula designed for the student body.

In the seventh chapter titled **“Classification, Normalization and the Construction of the “Other” in Pakistan’s Educational Discourse”**, the author brings our attention towards the articulation of “other” through space and exclusion. The articulation of space has multiple meanings. In the Indian subcontinent, metaphors which are feminine in nature such as mother or motherland are used for a country (space). When the space is considered feminine, there is a need to protect it. The security of the feminine space is possible due to intervention of the masculine characters. In the context of United India, the motherland of Muslims was threatened by the Hindus. Hence the Muslims makes sacrificed their lives and the Muslim females sacrificed their honors for their freedom. This chapter throws light towards the exclusion of existence of religious minorities, contribution of women and negative role of Ulema from the textbooks. There is an occasional mention of Non-Muslims in the official population statistics.

In the eighth chapter titled **“Education and Gendered Citizenship in Pakistan”** the author explains the constitution of different subjects and subjectivities through the educational discourse. One

discourse is connected to the creation of other discourses. This chapter explores how the educational discourse assigns meanings to different elements in our society. The author describes the process of surveillance in Pakistani society. The dominant segment of society has given the right of surveillance by the popular discourse. The most significant recognition of a Pakistani is being Muslim; hence all minorities living in the country are “othered”. The definition of an ideal Pakistani woman is based upon Islamic and pre-partition Indian History. If a woman does not follow the rules fixed by this definition, she will be ceased to be an ideal woman. According to the author, the educational discourse empowers some people in relation to majority of the population. There is a constructed need to make some people docile, so they will not be able to question or criticize the powerful segments of the country.

The book is an effective collection of pieces stitched together by a coherent narrative which is synchronic and diachronic in equal measure. The book also offers a strong dialogue between theoretical and pedagogical education practices existing in Pakistani academia; while doing so, it also looks at Pakistani educational system as a contested space of power, scapes and discursivity.

Ms. Samar Abdullah is student of M.Phil. Development Studies in Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.