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**SECULAR-RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PAKISTAN'S  
EDUCATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

The discourse of secular and religious education is very common in Pakistan. This discourse has been an academic concern for all of those working in the field of sociology of education across the boundaries. This study mainly focuses to explore how and when the discourse of secular and religious education emerged in Pakistan. Furthermore, this study also intends to unearth the major reasons behind this divide of education into secular and religious. Exploring the discourse of secular-religious education in Pakistan, this study uses interpretive paradigm which guides qualitative methodology. Using purposive sampling technique, a sample of 50 respondents (comprises of 25 school/college/university teachers and 25 madrasa teachers/alims) was selected for data collection. Interview guide was used as tool of data collection for in depth interviews with the respondents from across the KP province. The key theoretical insights come for this study from post colonialism to explore the question: how and why the secular-religious discourse of education emerged and what are the major causes of this discourse. The study

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findings suggest that ideological differences, misunderstanding of modern education, political differentiation among Muslim scholars, and lack of interest to understand secular education have given birth to the secular-religious discourse of education in Pakistan.

**Keywords: Secular-religious discourse, school-madrassa education, post-colonialism**

## **INTRODUCTION**

It has been admitted by many scholars [1-3] that during early course of Islamic history religious and worldly knowledge were given equal importance. [4-7] have pointed that contrary to the prevailing status, madrassa of the past produced many renowned scholars in different fields of worldly and religious sciences equally. The education institutes of the past not only concentrated on the transfer of “revealed” and “acquired” knowledge but also other fields as well like, fine arts, drawing, the arts of defense and tactical warfare, architecture, calligraphy, sculpture, medicine, pharmacy and [8]. But things reversed after decline of the Muslim rule in the World and particularly in Sub-continent [9].

The dichotomy between Madrassa and School Education aroused over time in Muslim countries during different epochs of the history [10] and Pakistan is no exception in this regard. Before partition of the Subcontinent this dilemma was present as modern education was taken very differently and a social upheaval was created by the

religious scholars to oppose it. This reveals that the dichotomy between Madrassa and School Education has a deep-rooted history in Pakistan. This paper tries to uncover various factors which have contributed to the emergence of split in religious and worldly knowledge. It tries to see how this split is developed into two major parallel streams of education in Pakistan.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinnings**

Substantial part of literature reveals that Muslims of the last five centuries suffer from having delusion to have had a real knowledge -that is self-sufficient [11]. They have the phobia of exposure to the new ideas -seeing them as threatening to their belief system and identity. There is a paradox in their perception about presenting their proud history that has provided base and impetus to the modern world of science but are constantly refused the wisdom or ideas originated from the moments of modernization. This shows their polemical, apologetic and nostalgic attitude towards their past.

In backdrop of this scenario, colonialism brought western education and replaced Madrassas that hindered development of all types of indigenous learning. The Madrassa system, especially in the Sub-continent started opposing the cultural and educational hegemony of the British, and underwent radical changes in terms of pedagogical and curriculum contents [5]. Madrassas in the Subcontinent focused on philosophy, law and Islamic study adapting Arabic language as a medium in contrast to western ways [12]. The key objective of introducing school education system by the colonial powers was to dominate Subcontinent (particularly Muslims) ideologically, politically and culturally [13]. A very visible dichotomy was developed in the organization of madrasa and school systems [14]. According to [4], after the thrashing out of the Muslims realms one by one due to wars with crusaders and internal political contentions Muslim learning and knowledge went into a condition of rot, from which tragically, it has not looked back. [15] said that the education system in Pakistani society is inherited from the Sub-continent where it had been divided into secular-religious systems that is deeply entrenched in the social and political dynamics of Pakistan.

The concept of post-colonialism has been applied here in this paper to explain how the forces of colonialism has deeply inflected the native socio-cultural domains and they been responded in the due course of time. Michal Foucault theory of knowledge-power nexus and Edward Said's "Orientalism" has been of help to explain how the locals been subjugated by colonial powers and how natives resisted them in the due course of time. Through the help of Post-colonial theory this study argues that, as a response to the fear of Islamic Education and its potential threat of sabotaging the British plane of complete control of Indian continent, they attempted to westernize/secularize their subjects through new education. This research used postcolonial lens to examine how indigenous scholars, especially Muslim thinkers encountered the West's imperial actions and tries to understand what occurred in the due course of time. According to [12], Post-colonialism is attentive in uncovering histories of violence, inequality, injustice and domination which may be the result of Western colonialism. Many Muslim scholars as mentioned by [10] think that the departure of worldly and religious subjects is a colonial invention. The tussle in school and madrassa system can actually be seen as imposition at

one hand and resistance at the other. This can be traced out as a struggle and contest for the authenticity of knowledge among western and oriental scholars.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study examines how and why the dichotomy in secular and religious education systems aroused over time in Muslims World, specifically in Pakistan. For this research different educational intuitions from both systems were purposively selected from where different stakeholders were carefully included in research sample. A sample of fifty four respondents including academicians and administrators of both the systems at various levels were chosen for the research study. To carry out this study the researcher employed qualitative methodology and relevant instrument/ tool of data collection. Objectivity and reliability was ensured as the basic prerequisites of research standards during deciding plan of this study.

Views and opinions of both groups were collected through in-depth interview with the help of interview guide. Interview guide was consisting of two parts. Parts one was made of closed ended questions aiming to know the profile of each respondents while part second was made of open ended questions that aimed to focus on the views and lived experiences of respondents about

various aspects religious-secular controversy. The data collected through recording and taking notes was transliterated into meaningful written form which was verified from the respondents to check the authenticity of the facts collected. The data was then gone through again and again to get familiarity with its main contents making it suitable for thematic analysis. After applying this technique recurring themes were coded and categorized, compared and contrasted to serve the purpose of the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Sowing the Seed of the School-Madrassa Education Discourse**

According to the dominant opinions of the respondents representing both systems the British rulers had produced English education system in the subcontinent region to maintain their hegemony through the local elites. Respondents of religious education maintain that this particular education is devoid of Islamic religious spirit, it is rather overshadowed by other religious spirits, and hence, there is no harmony between our religious education and the one brought about by foreign invaders. One of the participants expressed her/his views by saying that:

*“The division of religious-secular education systems*

*stands on well-established foundations being western and Islamic. The secular education is considered of English nature, comes from west, however, the religious education being Islamic goes back to Makkah and Madina. I mean that the very ideological paths of both the systems are opposite and contrasting in philosophical underpinnings”.*

Religious scholars mainly view the origin of the dichotomy between school and madrasa education is actually fueled by the British Empire in the shape of installing English/school education system in the region that is producing doctors, engineers, officers and bureaucrats but it has not produced even a single Alim (Islamic scholar). Another respondent almost said the same that:

*“In early times this differentiation was based only on philosophical grounds just for the convenience of students and scholars but latter on the foreign forces made this differentiation on the basis of political and ideological basis that created an antagonistic relationship*

*between religious and worldly educations”.*

Majority of the respondents are agree that before British invasion of the Subcontinent madrasa education was in vague which also had covered school education. But In Subcontinent, British altogether tried to burry Islamic religious education as well as other types of indigenous knowledge under their own system. They didn't succeed fully in destroying the madrasa system but were fully succeeded in inculcating the division and in creating the gap between worldly and religious education. Even many Muslim thinkers were taken by British people in their hands and advocated their policy from which bulk of masses got influenced. This is how the difference and antagonism were started from that time which culminated over time. The current state tools follow the same policy where some interest groups have full access to country resources. Having these resources in control they enjoy full benefits at the cost of depriving major segments of society.

### **Emergence of Dichotomy in Religious and Secular Education**

Discussing school-madrasa education's dichotomy with focus on its origination as one of the main variables of this research, the seculars are of the opinion that with the rise of the religion Islam the

early Muslims were equipped with both of the education systems (religious and secular) because they were aware of the societal politics, economics and all other societal businesses but later on this dichotomy originated. Taking the same point for discussion, different respondents from school education are to some extent agreeing with their counter group in terms of western influence affecting the overall education system as one expressed his views as:

*“Historically speaking there was no difference between these two systems of education in early Islam, like Umar Farooq (R.A.) was a religious scholar, politician as well as a warrior at the same time. It means that Muslims in start were equipped with both types of education which were later on separated”.*

Dominantly, scholars from school education system were of the opinion that the religious scholars handed over their own tools of Islamic education to the British and resisting the overall western education due to their narrow approach that contributed negatively and has led the two streams apart from each other. They opposed western education to the level that even the best of things which could have been very beneficial for the overall

socio-economic development, were detested and hatred as one has pointed out:

*“When schools were established during British times, they were strongly opposed by religious scholars particularly low class religious scholar (namely mulla in the local context) which was not an appropriate approach of that time”.*

The same approach against British education system was carried out further by the common masses. Mostly, the secular scholars from school education system think of madrassa scholars as they have gone very far in the direction opposite to secular education system. Nonetheless, they even unconsciously ignored the basics of Islamic injunctions that reiterates on discovery and recognizing and identifying the wonders of universe which was only possible through embracing science knowledge, in other words the western education system.

Respondents from school education system were of the view that at least they (religious scholars) could get the positive elements from western invaders as Hindus had done that is why they excelled Muslims in all worldly matters during British India. They see that the real split in knowledge was started during this time due to taking extreme position by mullahs of that time. From the

discussion on how the conflict between religious and school education was started, by both the groups it is evident that madrasa respondents make only the West as responsible while the other group make responsible the clergy of that time as a contributing factor to the Western planners in devastating the indigenous educational framework and pattern.

### **Transformation of Dichotomy from Pre-partition to Pakistan**

Education was one of the powerful tools in sustaining British legacy in pre-partition India that eventually transformed to independent Pakistan. Education being a powerful instrument of national integration, social cohesion and development has utterly failed in Pakistan because of its weak foundation [16].

[9] Says that in fact, it can be called an historical irony that Muslim nations are very much deprived in the fields of science as one cannot deny the great influence of Muslim scholars to the world civilization in the past. An endless list of Muslim scientists can be made, who worked not only in religious sciences but also in many branches of empirical and rational sciences. This poor foundation in education has led to the absence of a common vision of how and what education must look like in Pakistan,

dismay, misperception, and divisions aroused instead [17]. Ideological and Political hostility of countless Islamic academics to the West has turned the Islamic stage (madrasa system) into a counterculture.

[12] sees stagnation of Islamic knowledge in the long range produced Muslim's generations to feel content with their religiosity, which did not reflect some admirable characters in making a peaceful life together with other than them. Contrary to the findings of many researchers, majority of respondents from madrassas are very pessimistic about madrasa system in Pakistan and see it ahead than other Islamic countries in religious education. They give credit to this system for being survived and still very dominant instead of many challenges and plans even by the state machinery to sabotage its essence one way or the other. They abhor the situation of worldly education for being not fully projecting the ideology of the country. Pakistan is number one in Islamic education in the world. It is in spite of the fact that we have number one Islamic education whether it is male or female and we are not supported by government.

Contrary to the views of madrasa related people, the scholars from school education system endorse the idea of that

Pakistan overall education is worst and very low in terms of scientific growth from developed countries. It is so deteriorated and in dwindling position from many perspectives. From these views it can easily be concluded that it can't be compared in any aspect whether that is substance, manners or style. Secular scholars think of madrasa education that its curriculum is not updated and in no position to meet needs of the day.

### **Development of Secular-religious Education Discourse in Pakistan**

The importance of education system is not valued by the Pakistani state which has threatened the development in all fields of life [11]. [17] stated that education system in Pakistan has no uniform structure that is why different curricula are followed by various education systems. [12] also stresses that the divisive system of education has created big gap among the citizen of the country which deeply caused the cultural veins of the nation. This divisive system also provided a space to the recent wave of terrorism and sectarian violence. He further argues that the polarized education system of Pakistan has played a great role in the social division on the basis of political, social and economic grounds. Even in this case, people related to madrasa are as pessimistic about the growth of madrasa and view this development at the

cost of downfall of worldly education due to negligence and corruption bureaucracy and political gentry. While people from the school system are lamenting on the current education conditions in terms of not being scientific and updated. According to them it has not received the required resources and attention from policy makers. They find faults at micro and macro level with in education and attribute its faults mainly to government machinery.

From this discussion, it can be drawn easily that madrasa people are looking for the causes of poor status of education within the country in past in terms of deviating from the actual path of keeping on track of Islamic ideology on which the country was got while the other group is focused on why the policy makers could catch with needs of the time and explain how they failed in cementing the strong foundation of education on modern scientific lines.

### **Extension of the Dichotomy in Education in Pakistan**

[18] stated that Pakistani education has multiple varieties, contradiction between and among education systems of religious madrasas and government schools. Madrasa education is further divided into various sects, each one is representing separate ideological school of thought. This



division within division among major streams of both education systems has complicated the whole education panorama. Madrassa education related people are conscious of various divisions in school education and seem to be wary of it while don't look upon the different streams within madrassa education itself. They even defend these divisions for various reasons. In opposition, the other group is against both type divisions and look at them as created by deferent forces just to achieve their agenda only.

## **CONCLUSION**

Discussing and comparing views of the respondents with the help of empirical evidences and theoretical scholarship about secular-religious discourse of education in Pakistan, this study explored two types of dominant views on the birth and causes behind the madrassa-school dichotomy. A maximum number of religious scholars blame western nations and their policies for cultivating seed of the secular-religious dichotomy in education at the subcontinent region historically and transforming the same to Pakistan. They believe that this dichotomy was created under the pre-planned policies of the western nations to create controversies and subvert the established religious education system in Pakistan. However, the

secular scholars (school, college and university teachers) dominantly expressed their views that the misconception of the religious scholars about the secular education created this dichotomy of school-madrassa education. The further argued that religious scholars with their orthodox beliefs do not accept any other system of education which makes them only religious centered and lead them towards hatred about secular education. This study suggesting one possible solution for overcoming this heated up discourse of secular-religious education that a liberal view is needed to overlook into both of the systems with neutral view and also suggesting debates and discussions among the secular and religious scholars on large scale.

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