



Pakistan
Young Leaders'
Conference 2010

Youth Affairs

Chair: Mahlaqa Shaukat
Co-Chair: Mutahir Chaudry



Increasing globalization has increased the influence of Western culture in Pakistan, especially among the affluent, who have easy access to Western products, television, media, and food. Many Western food chains have established themselves in Pakistan, and are found in the major cities. At the same time, there is also a reactionary movement within Pakistan that wants to turn away from Western influences, and this has manifested itself in a return to more traditional roots, often conflated with Islam.

“...This polarization of society has been matched step-for-step by the polarization of religion within the country...”

Mahlaqa Shaukat and Mutahir Chaudry

Table of Contents

Introduction to the topic	2
History.....	2
Details of Influence	3
Conflicts and Contrasts.....	5
Questions to be answered	5
References.....	6

Introduction to the Topic Area

Pakistan's culture is very diverse. This stems from the fact that what is now Pakistan has in the past been invaded and occupied by many different peoples, including White Huns, Persians, Arabs, Turks, Mongols and various Eurasian groups. There are differences in culture among the different ethnic groups in matters such as dress, food, and religion, especially where indigenous pre-Islamic customs differ from Islamic practices.

Increasing globalization has increased the influence of Western culture in Pakistan, especially among the affluent, who have easy access to Western products, television, media, and food. Many Western food chains have established themselves in Pakistan, and are found in the major cities. At the same time, there is also a reactionary movement within Pakistan that wants to turn away from Western influences, and this has manifested itself in a return to more traditional roots, often conflated with Islam.



Figure 1: Images from the Pakistan fashion week.

A large Pakistani Diaspora exists, especially in the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Australia as well as in the Scandinavian nations. A large number of Pakistanis are also living in the Middle east. These emigrants and their children influence Pakistan culturally and economically, by travelling to Pakistan, and especially by returning or investing there.



Figure 2: Foreign Food Chains are Rampant in Pakistan

History of the Topic

Causes of the problem:

1) Globalization:

The impact of globalization on culture has been viewed primarily as a side effect. Nonetheless, for those absorbed with the subject, reactions tend to be deeply divided. For example, one observer has asserted that, "... globalization promotes integration and the removal not only of cultural barriers but many of the negative dimensions of culture. Globalization is a vital step toward both a more stable world and better lives for the

people within it."5 Others, however, have treated globalization of culture as an evil because of their fears of the pervasive power and duplicity of multinational corporations or international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In recent years, this reaction has been manifest in sometimes violent demonstrations when the leaders of the world's richest countries (e.g., the G-8, the European Union) have held their meetings. In light of this ongoing debate it is important to closely analyse the effects of globalization in Pakistan and whether it is a cause or an effect of the problem at hand.

2) Post Colonialism ("Colonization of the mind"):

The departure of British physically from the sub-continent, by no means, meant that the British control over this area was completely relinquished. The British during their reign were not only able to subjugate the Indians politically and economically but perhaps the most important achievement of theirs was to leave such a deep imprint in the mind of an Indian of their military, economic and political superiority that even future generations of these Indians were not able to shake that image off. Today, in the three countries of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, this "colonization of the mind", as so aptly put by a writer, still exists and is one of the root causes of the identity crisis faced by the youth of these countries. The process which was begun more than 60 years ago has gained momentum over the years because of several other factors which have assisted and sustained it. These include technological progress, globalization, dissatisfaction with incompetent governments, disillusionment of the youth and many more.

Details of the Topic

This topic area can be divided both into the positive and negative elements of this Western Influence and the different facets of life on which the west has made the greatest impact. This study-guide is by no means exhaustive since the influence wielded by western elements is so vast that it cannot possibly be done justice to in 5, or even 25 pages for that matter.

Positive Influence:

Provision of Basic Human Rights:

The first and the most prominent is the Freedom of Press, Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Action. These fundamental rights have mostly been secured through excessive Western influence. Whether it be through an indirect manner (western teachings in schools and university which have shaped the collective consciousness of the people in such a manner so as to protest against Human Rights violations) or through direct means (access to the free media in western countries has encouraged the Pakistani people to expect and ask for for the same rights).

The Feminist movement:

Western Influence has brought with itself a considerable chunk of the Feminist movement to Pakistan. Women in Pakistan enjoy much more liberty compared to some other Muslim countries. A few example are of trivial incidents like women taking part in International sports competitions and being allowed to vote, drive and pretty much enjoy the same liberty as most women all over the world do.

The Revamping of the Judicial system:

Judiciary has recently taken keen interest in people's difficulties and now the courts accept petitions for Sue --- a concept unheard few years back. Courts have also started looking into cases of Human Rights' violations which were previously either ignored completely or at best placed on the back burner.

The above influences have generated a round of debate themselves as well. Many do not consider them to be positive elements at all, but the popular opinion is in their favor.

Negative Influences:

Cultural and Social Values:

The flip side of the coin, however, gives a more wholesome and sinister picture. The excessive Americanization has encroached upon the local culture. The extended and nectar family system, a hall mark of Pakistani social values, is slowly losing its place in society and is being replaced by a nuclear family system and a culture of individualism. This correlates with an increase in the incidence of psychological disorders in the society at large and an increase in the suicide and divorce rates.

Body Image Distortions:

A study of how young Australian and Pakistani women perceive their bodies has yielded the interesting observation that within the Pakistani sample, young women from English-medium institutions expressed greater weight concern than did the Urdu-medium females. The results indicate that the traditional standards of beauty among young Pakistani females of upper socio-economic groups are being replaced by what is attractive in Western terms. Pakistani females perceived their current figure to be significantly larger than their ideal shape and the shape they thought was opposite-attractive and women-attractive

The comparative study of the body image of Western and Pakistani young females has also indicated that with increasing globalization, there is, among the educated, a modern culture that touches all countries and which is beginning to override old traditions and place a more powerful emphasis on physical appearance. In view of increasing globalization, it is difficult to predict the extent of the future influence of Western culture on these Eastern cultures and their life-styles.

Influence on cuisine:

The traditional concept of home-cooked food and family meals is slowly being replaced with take-out and home-delivery of fast food from western food chains such as KFC and McDonald's. Even in local restaurants and food chains the menu offered is more often than not made up of anglicized food items. Instead of traditional drinks almost the entire population below the age of 20 prefers Coca cola and Pepsi.

Sexual Frustration:

With increase in the availability and accessibility of erotic imagery, both through the internet and Western movies, the strict social norms and rules of Pakistani society seem even more stifling for the youth of Pakistan. While the youth is constantly trying to test the boundaries of these social norms, the level of sexual frustration amongst the youth and adult population has steadily been rising. Statistics show that the demand for pornography has risen and so have the rape rates.

Violence, Drug-abuse and Profligacy:

Many studies have shown that increased exposure to the above three, vis-a-vis movies, internet, video-games or any other channel, leads to a higher incidence of these attributes amongst the population. This can explain the higher prevalence of these traits, especially within the younger population in recent years. These mediums of disseminating information have a stronger impact on the young, since that segment of the population is the most vulnerable to such influences.

Influences on language:

Perhaps, by far the greatest impact of the West on Pakistani society and youth has been through the English language. With language comes literature and with literature come ideas; a domino effect, which began in the colonial era and is still working within Pakistani society. Modern manifestations of this effect can be seen in the gradual change of script of the Urdu language into that of English. The biggest part played in this transition of script is by the increasing emailing and mobile phone messaging habits which have sprouted and taken firm root

in the youth culture of modern day Pakistan. And this is to talk of those who still use Urdu as a medium of communication. With the official language of the government being English (Urdu is one too, but only on paper) and English being used as a tool to highlight class distinctions between the poor and the wealthy, there is a distinct social stratum of people who are considered to be the 'elite' by virtue of their proficiency in English. In the local slang they are even referred to as the "burger" lot.

The above mentioned influences are by no means the only areas where the Western society has had a strong impact. The western cultural influence ranges from things as trivial as the everyday past times of the youth to issues of extreme import and concern, such as the social value system. Even the most minute detail of the mundane daily routine has been, in one way or the other touched by the western way of life.

Conflicts and Contrasts sprouted by this influence:

The recent developments in the United States Foreign Policy, specifically within the Muslim world, has led to another trend, one that is not inviting to American influences and turns towards religion and nationalism as a response. Hence the once benign conflict over Americanization in Pakistan has, in the recent years, been aggravated into radical movements focusing on the fundamentals of religion. This backlash from society is also partly a result of the increased class-consciousness that has been brought about by western influences. The divide between the rich and the poor, the westernized and the non-westernized, the English-medium and the Urdu-medium has gone a long way in reinforcing class boundaries and hence bred resentment amongst certain groups in society.

This polarization of society has been matched step-for-step by the polarization of religion within the country. Westernization has pushed people to the two extremes of religion. This is because people perceive themselves to have two options, either to embrace the west wholeheartedly and do-away with minor inconveniences such as religious beliefs and societal norms or to condemn this influence and use religion to gather support for their agendas which focus on destroying the perpetrators of these ignoble practices.



Figure 3: A contemporary film showcasing the identity crisis faced by the youth of Pakistan.

Questions that a resolution must answer:

- 1) What are the exact reasons for the influence of the west in Pakistan?
- 2) Is this influence for the better or for the worse?
- 3) How to counter all the harmful aspects of Western Influence?
- 4) How to imbibe all the positive aspects into society?
- 5) Where should the youth draw the line?
- 6) Which social classes are the most vulnerable to this influence?

- 7) How should the youth tackle the backlash to the process of "Americanization"?
- 8) How to depolarize the Pakistani society?
- 9) What can the government, the youth, the NGO's and educational institutions do to implement the above reforms?
- 10) What should the short-term and the long-term strategies for reform be?

References:

1. <http://pakistan.saarctourism.org/pakistan-culture.html>
2. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/20020163>
3. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/20020163.pdf>
4. http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\01\24\story_24-1-2008_pg7_19
5. http://www.oberlin.edu/shansi/grants_proposal_04/04_winter_c.pdf
6. <http://www.dartabligh.org/youth/americanplans.html>

Pictures:

- i. Figure 1: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_AzcCjekDkGg/SvyxVjiEdxI/AAAAAAAAARA/h2EFOy3ND-A/s1600/modern+inf..jpg
- ii. Figure 2: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_A-roaUmCWXw/SwOIWhCH9fI/AAAAAAAAABhU/AsX3tXiaW58/s1600/JalPeno_Chicken_60x20_FL_02Print.jpg
- iii. Figure 3: http://images.google.com.pk/imgres?imgurl=http://nitawriter.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/khuda-ke-liye.jpg&imgrefurl=http://nitawriter.wordpress.com/2008/05/02/khuda-ke-liye-movie-review/&usq=__4BDP6bUiFXB7hsTxIbMDWJjPCE0=&h=279&w=302&sz=17&hl=en&start=7&tbnid=eNRo02W7nqzqEM:&tbnh=107&tbnw=116&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dkhuda%2Bke%2Bliye%26gbv%3D2%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG