

Pakistan Studies

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Culture And Society



What Is Culture?

The Search For Satisfactory Answer To This Question Has Given Rise To A Great Deal Of Discussion And Debate.

What Is Pakistani Culture?

It Is Another Difficult Question For Which No Completely Acceptable Answer Has Yet Been Evolved, But Towards Which We Can Draw Closer By Discussing And Debating The Question

The United Nations Economic, Social And Cultural Organization UNESCO (2002) Has Defined Culture As:

“Culture Should Be Regarded As The Set Of Distinctive **Spiritual, Material, Intellectual And Emotional** Features Of Society Or A Social Group, And That It Encompasses, In Addition To **Art And Literature, Lifestyles, Ways Of Living Together, Value Systems, Traditions And Beliefs.** In Short, It Requires **Unity In Diversity**”.

The Main Components Of Culture

The Following Four Elements Can Be Considered To Be The Main Components Of Culture:

1. Values
2. Norms
3. Institutions
4. Artefacts

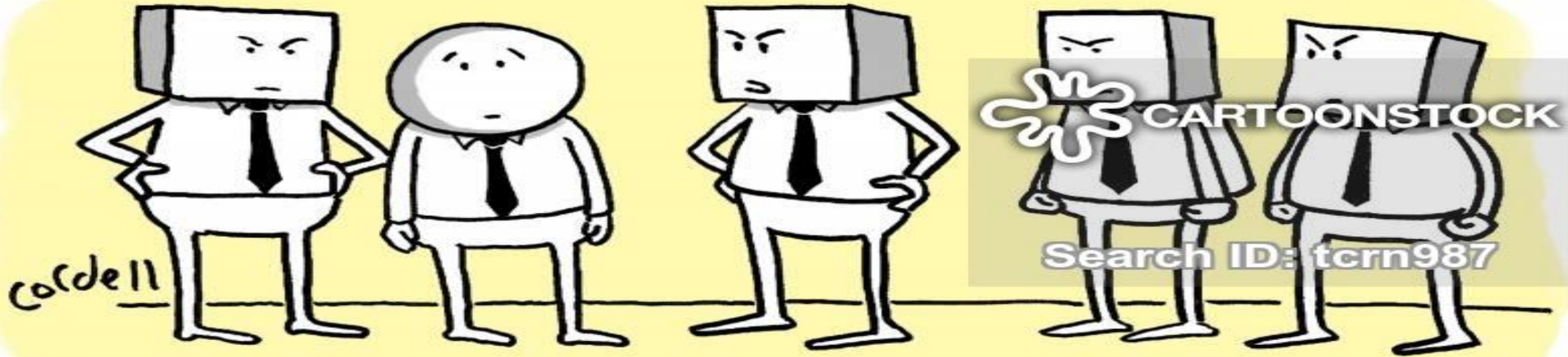
Values

Values Can Be Described As Ideas Of What Seems **Important** In Life To A Group Of People Or A Society. They Are **Ideals** That **Guide** Or Qualify Conduct And **Interaction** Among People. They Help To Distinguish **What Is Right From What Is Wrong**, Serve As A Guide On How To Conduct Life In A Meaningful Way.

Culture Is Greatly Influenced By Values;
And Most Often The Ideas They Generate
Are Brought Together In Religion From
Which Society Drives Its Values. For
Example, Honesty Is A Value Present In
Some Religions But Not In All.

Norms

Norms Consist Of What Society Considers As **Normal Behavior**. Eating With One's Finger Is Considered Normal Behavior In South Asia But Not In Europe. Each Culture Has Methods Or Sanctions, Of Making Sure That People Live And Respect Its Norms. If You Eat With Your Fingers In A European City, People May Look At You With Disapproval, So That You May Stop Eating That Way.



“What’s wrong with you?”

Sanctions May Be Strict Or Not, Depending upon The Importance Of The Norm. Norms That A Society **Enforces** In A Formal Manner Because It Considers Them Important, Become The **Laws Of The Society**. For Example, Drinking Alcohol Is Legally Prohibited In Pakistan

Institutions

Institutions Are The **Structures Of A Society** Within Which Values And Norms Are **Practiced And Transmitted**. Some Institutions Are Exclusive To South Asian Society, Such As ***Mushairas***. However, **Marriage Is An Institution** Of Our Society Which Prevails In Many Other Societies As Well. In All These Societies Having **Family** And Providing Stability For Them Is Considered An **Important Norm**. The Rituals Which Are Legal Are Religious, Those Which Are Cultural Are Social

Artefacts

Artefacts Are **Shaped By A Culture's Values And Norms**. A Society's Art And Crafts Come Under This Heading. **Geometrical Design** For Example, Has Grown Out Of Islamic Culture As A Substitute For The Artistic Depiction Of Human Bodies Which Is Not Acceptable In Culture. This Is An Example Of How A Culture's Values Influence Its Artefacts.

The Earliest Mosque, At Medina, Had No Dome Or Minaret, But Now A Dome And Minaret Are The Most Recognizable Feature Of The Mosque.



Mosque At Medina, During Prophet PBUH

Culture Has Also Been Described As
The Result Of 'The Best That Has
Been Thought And Said In The
World'.

In A Progressive, Developing And Evolving Culture, All Achievements And Accomplishments Improve With Time. In Such A Culture, All Improvement Is Given A Great Deal Of Importance, And Since Improvement Becomes A Value, People Are Open To Listening To And Acting Upon The Views Of Others.

Thought And Respect For Ideas Are
Forces Inherent In The Development Of
A Culture's Artefacts, Just As Thought
And Research Are Reflected In Scientific
Advancement.

Those Who Are Courteous, Tolerant
And Calm Are Considered Cultured, As
Are Those Who Are Interested In The
Artefacts And Institutions Of Their Own
And Other Cultures

Culture And Classes

It Is Often Said That Culture Is
The Collective Behavior Of The
Educated Segment Of Society

Education Is Conceived To be A
Vital Ingredient Of Culture. When
We Call A Man 'Cultured' We
Presuppose A Certain Level Of
Education.

We Can Relate Our Observation To The Class Structures Of Pakistan

We Can Say That The Appreciation Of Art And The
Patronage Of Art Belong To The Pakistani Upper Class,
Although The Creation Of Art Itself May Be Outside
The Purview Of The Upper Class

Apart From The Arts, As far As
Customs, Manners And
Behavioral Norms Go, They
Belong More To The Middle And
Lower Classes.

Dress And Food **Varies**
From **Class To Class** In
Style, But In Seemliness,
There Is Unity.

Education Is An Important
Element In Relation To The
Arts As Well.

There Are Many Arts Which Cannot Be Appreciated Naturally. They Develop From An Acquired Taste. For Example, In Pakistan, Classical Musical And Modern Art Can Be Appreciated Only By Those Who Know The Intricacies Of These Arts. Folk Music And Pop Music Have Separate But Overlapping Audiences.

There Is An Effort By Established Artists To Embrace The Crude And Garish Artwork On Trucks And Busses



Literature Is The Only Art Which Is
Available To All Classes, But Even
Here There Is A Distinction
Between Serious And Popular
Literature

Popular Literature Is Devoured More By The Middle Class.

Cinema Has Not Yet Found Its Bearings, In Spite Of Three Or Four High Class Films. Television Drama Which Played A Formative Role In Fostering Cultural Awakening Has Seen Technical Advance And Artistic Decline At The Same Time.

Culture And Politics

Culture Acquires A Political
Dimension When The Culture Of
The Conqueror Perceived To Be
Higher Than The Culture Of The
Conquered

Since Pakistani Culture Cannot Be
Divested Of Its British Content, The
Clothes We Wear, The Language
Employed Both By This Writer And His
Readers And Other Technological
Improvements Into Our Life

Education In English Overcame The
Separatist Tendency Of Vernacular
Languages And Provided An Outer
Shell To Culture.

In Other Words, Acting As A Common Language Among Speakers Of
Various Regional languages, English Brought Them Closer, Giving
Their Cultures A Better Chance To Merge.

In Pakistan, Cultural Varieties
Have Been Given A Political
Meaning. It Is Reiterated That By
Neglecting Regional Cultures We
Are Threatening The Federation.

One Of The Reasons Why East
Pakistan Broke Away Was The
Issue Of Not Giving Bengali Its
Rightful Place.

Cultural Heritage And Modern Culture

Although Culture Is The Term Most
Used To Interpret History, The
Historical Component Of Culture Is
Not Unanimously Acknowledged.

People Wishing To Reform, Are
Mostly Hampered By Hereditary Or
Historical Norms; Like The Mughal
And British Attempts To Abolish *Sati*.

The Cultural Scene In Pakistan Attests To The Compartmentalization Of The Historical And Current

The Badshahi Mosque, Lahore Is Our Cultural Heritage,
The Tooba Mosque In Karachi Is A Product Of Modern
Culture.



Badshahi Mosque, Lahore



Tooba Mosque, Karachi

In Historical Terms It Should Be Clarified
That The Possession Of Great Cultural
Heritage, To Belong To A Religion Which
Has Had A Great Cultural Impact Is Not
The Same As Possessing A Great Culture

A Great Culture Is One
That Can Overcome
Military Superiority.

The Hindus Were Able To Assimilate
Conquerors Like The Huns And
Muslims Were Able To Convert
Mongols And Tartars Who Were Their
Conquerors, To Their Own Religion.

When The British Invaded India,
European Culture Was In A Dynamic
State; Scientific Discoveries, Political
Theorizing And Literature Were
Receiving And Impetus, And At The
Same Time Muslims Were Reflecting
On Their Decline.

Gradually The Mold Of South
Asian Culture Will Become
Obsolete. The Mold Of Modern
Pakistan Will Come Into Play

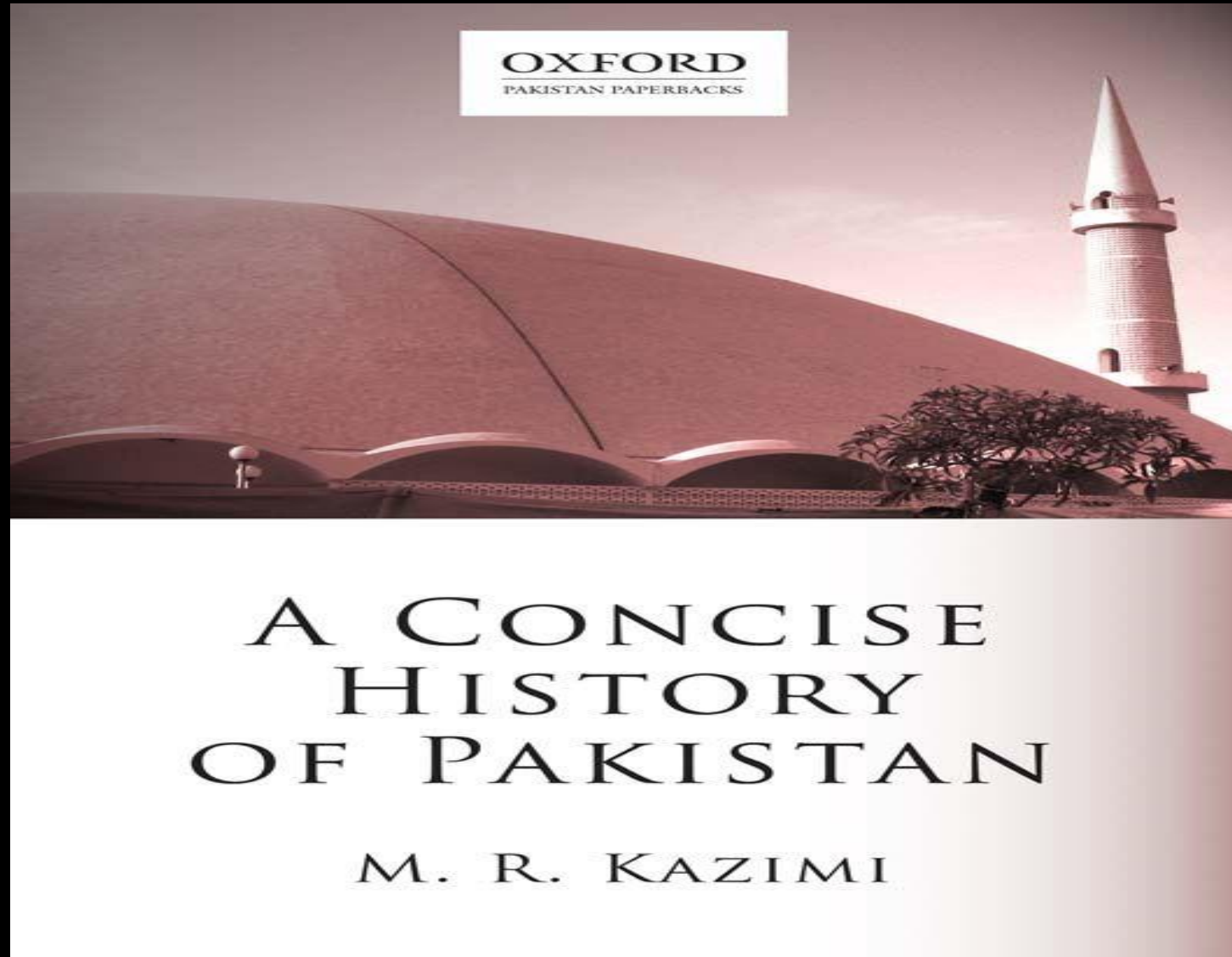
Perhaps The Present Is Not Equal To The Past, But Nevertheless It Will Point To The Future, To A Pakistan Which Is Perforce Nuclear, A Pakistan Which Is Threatened, A Pakistan Which, In Addition, Is Beset With Environmental Hazards, Which Has Serious Gender Inequalities, And Which Is Sitting On A Population Time Bomb.

These Are To Be The Future
Parameters Of Pakistani Culture
Regardless Of Whether We
Overcome These Challenges, Or
Whether They Overwhelm Us.

If These Trends Are A Danger, They Are
Equally So To All Pakistanis And In That
Sense They Have A Unifying Effect, For
They Call For All Of Us To Put Our
Heads Together In Order To Evolve
Values And A Mode Of Life Acceptable
To All.

Question/Answers

Reference



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A CONCISE HISTORY OF PAKISTAN

M. R. KAZIMI