

Final Report - Summer 2007

Title: Enlightening Pakistan

School: Middlebury College

Student(s) Information:

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1. **Project Summary:**

The project was carried out in Pakistan (Lahore, Rawalpindi and Islamabad) between June and August 2007. It had three distinct components, running independently of each other. Over 30 individuals worked in the implementation of the various components of this project. Additional stipend was obtained from Middlebury College.

Here's a description of the work done:

1. Producing Thinking Minds: A Report on Pakistan's Secondary School Curricula and Textbooks

Prepared by a team of 17 people (most of whom were college students), this report, titled 'Producing Thinking Minds', gives an in depth analysis and critique on what is wrong with Pakistan's national school textbooks and curricula. It particularly targets the rote-learning based educational approach, flawed assessment techniques and the low quality texts and materials in the books. A serious attempt has been made in this report to provide innovative solutions to the above-mentioned problems from the perspective of students.

The report also looks at the historical stereotypes and biases that are promoted through the textbooks by the government and are indeed the root cause of extremism in the society. We have argued that not removing such material from the textbooks would prove detrimental to Pakistan's peace efforts with the neighboring countries and the overall vision of tolerance and enlightenment in the society.

This report was properly publicized through print and electronic media and its copies were submitted to the President, Prime Minister, Education Minister, State Education Departments, Textbook Boards, educational institutions and various NGO's. The Federal Minister for Education was taken into confidence about the making of this report and the scope of work was discussed with him. Various stakeholders have shown interest in working towards the implementation of this report.

PDF version of this report can be accessed from:
<http://www.enlightenedpakistan.org/final.pdf>

2. Journey Into Light: A Documentary on the Spiritual Side of Islam (Sufism)

Sufism is an aspect of Islamic and Pakistani culture that very few people know about. Far from being something theoretical, Sufism is in fact a very influential and integral part of life for a big chunk of Pakistan's population, owing to people's attachment to different Sufi shrines.

We produced a 20 minutes documentary describing the place of Sufism in Pakistan's society. The purpose of this venture is to highlight and promote this extremely peaceful and tolerant side of Islamic culture that can potentially be used as a counter to intolerance and fundamentalism.

A streaming version of this documentary would soon be available at enlightenedpakistan.org

3. School Workshop Campaign and Mentoring Program

Our teams went to various lower-middle class high schools and conducted interactive sessions with the goals of promoting critical thinking, open-minded argumentation and introducing students to formal ways of debating. We have also initiated a 'Mentoring Program' on pilot basis at one of these schools whereby the students will continue to receive guidance counseling from our appointees.

The idea is to equip students with the tools with which they could embrace 'enlightenment', rather than preaching our own notions to them.

2. Project Results:

Even though we were not able to execute a few things due to security issues in Pakistan, we would term the project as a big success.

We strongly believe that the most needed thing in bringing about a positive change in Pakistani society is overhauling the education system – whether the desired end is progress, increased prosperity or promotion of tolerance.

Through our project, we made substantial leaps in that direction. At the macro level, we prepared a policy report which has been well received by the relevant circles. And at the micro level, we initiated the School Workshop Campaign that does good work in its own right and also sets a model for others to follow.

The documentary's objectives were totally different. They were to educate people (in and outside Pakistan) about the peaceful side of Islamic tradition. How successful we are in doing that would be determined in due time when we properly release our documentary.

3. Implications:

As has been discussed above, all the components of the project were logically related to peace, at various levels.

We created an organization/social action group by the name of 'Enlightened Pakistan' and used it as a front for carrying out different activities for this project. This organization is now a going concern with a team running its affairs in Pakistan. Tasks being carried out by that team include continuing the school workshop campaign, publicizing our finished projects and doing essential correspondence. Many more people are applying to join Enlightened Pakistan.

Work has also been started on publishing a Youth Journal – that will target various important issues from youth's perspective. More programming is envisioned in future for Enlightened Pakistan.

Further details about Enlightened Pakistan can be accessed from:

<http://www.enlightenedpakistan.org>

PRODUCING THINKING MINDS
A Report on Pakistan's Secondary School Curricula and Textbooks



ENLIGHTENED PAKISTAN

