

## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IN PAKISTAN

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### PREAMBLE

*While developing this paper my primary concern is what has been researched on and how research is being pursued in the field of South Asian studies in general and of Pakistan studies in particular, inside and outside the country, rather than to focus only on what is new and trendy. As a member of an institute, i.e. the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University, Germany, that was set up half a century ago to study South Asia in an interdisciplinary way, I feel tempted to do that. I am aware of the fact, that as an economist and outsider my assessment may be rightfully considered to be biased. The fields of academic interest to some extent depend on the economic and political environment of the social scientist. Career prospects determine the choice of the subject as well as the methods. The availability of generous research funds for some topics and hardly any money for others play an eminent role in a country where the teaching load can be heavy and where private means are lacking. Interdisciplinary research needs a deeper understanding of concepts, approaches, and terminology of other disciplines and the insight that there are no lead and supportive disciplines, and that we all need to learn from each other. Research must not be hierarchical: Too much insight is lost, if field work, analysis and reporting is done by different people. Quantitative and qualitative research has to go hand in hand, and last not least, social science research needs international comparison. There are economies and societies to be studied inside and outside of the region. Finally, it should be profitable to do more research on research itself: Not only who is doing what and how much has been published and where, but also how research results find entry into policy making and teaching.*

### ACADEMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND GERMANY IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

In the wake of the preparation of Allama Iqbal's centenary, Mr. Munir Ahmad, the Cultural Counsellor of the Pakistan Embassy in Bonn, suggested to establish a professorial fellowship, funded by the Government of Pakistan, in honour of Dr. Muhammad Iqbal. The Allama had spent some months in Heidelberg in 1907 when he was waiting to defend his doctoral thesis on the Development of Metaphysics in Persia at Munich University. His letters are proof of his success in mastering the German language. Almost three quarters of a century later, Professor Mohammed Ajmal Makhdum became the first "Iqbal-Professor" at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University [henceforth SAI-HU]. He was followed by Professors Mohammad S. Khan Shibli,

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Fateh Mohammed Malik (two times), Hasan Askari Rizvi, Pervez Cheema and – presently – Syed Wiqar Ali Shah. They came from different disciplines and blended excellently in our multidisciplinary Institute, setting fine examples of crossing the borders of disciplines in teaching and research. The Iqbal Chair at Heidelberg University is just one example of the long-standing and close academic relations between Pakistan and Germany since the early 1950s. Pakistan sent out promising young scholars not only to the United Kingdom, but also to countries of the non-English speaking world, in order to learn more about systems different from that of the former “mother country”. At the same time, university teachers and students from all over the world came to Pakistan. Among the Germans, Professor Otto Schiller advised the Government of Pakistan’s Agricultural Commission. When he became Head of the Institute of International Comparative Agricultural Policy and Rural Sociology of the newly established SAI-HU, he guided a number of doctoral students from Pakistan and Germany working on the agricultural systems of Pakistan in cooperation with the Agricultural University in Lyallpur (now: Faisalabad). Under his successor Professor Winfried von Urff, we were a group of young economists studying Pakistan’s development in cooperation again with the Agricultural University, with the Department of Economics of Quaid-e-Azam University (QAU), and with the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). Professors Mahmood Khan, Dilawar Ali Khan (both from Agriculture University Lyallpur), Abdul Matin (Peshawar University), Hussein Mallick (QAU) and Syed Nawab Haider Naqvi [PIDE] were among those with whom contacts were closest. Professor Frithjof Kuhnen and Prof. Manig (both Göttingen University) guided a series of studies, mainly in the Peshawar Valley. In Political Science Professor Karl E. Newman (Köln University) and Dr. Hans Frey (SAI-HU) taught at university. Professor Karl-Heinz Pfeffer (Münster University) had been teaching at Punjab University and started its Social Science Research Centre; his son, Professor Georg Pfeffer (then: Freiburg University, later Heidelberg and Berlin), started Anthropology at QAU; Dr. Naved-e-Rahat, Dr. Azam Chaudhury, both now at QAU, the late Dr. Adam Nayyar of Lok Virsa, Dr. Naghma Imdad, and Dr. Anis Dani were among his first students. Dr. Doris Buddenberg (SAI-HU) also taught anthropology at QAU; Professor Jürgen Wasim Frembgen (Munich University) is a frequent visitor. Among the historians, Professor Gita Dharampal-Frick recently taught at QAU. Professor Jamal Malik (Erfurt University), a Pakistan national who grew up in Germany, now is our best expert on religion and society in Pakistan.

The German Democratic Republic, i.e. the erstwhile East German state, had a different approach to South Asian studies with emphasis on languages. Dr. Christina Österheld who now teaches Urdu at the SAI-HU, Dr. Bettina Robotka, now in Karachi, the political scientist Dr. Dietrich Reetz and the Sindhi-specialist Dr. Michael Schied are among those still active. Professor Karl Jetmar, an Anthropologist (SAI-HU) shared a fascination in the rock carvings in the Upper Indus with Professor Ahmad Hassan Dani (QAU). Every year he would come with a Pakistan-German expedition to study those manifestations of change and exchange of cultures in Northern Pakistan. His work was continued by a larger group of researchers of the Pak-German Karakoram Project, led by Professor Irmtraud Stellrecht (Tübingen University); the work on the rock inscriptions went on under Professor Herald Hauptmann (Heidelberg University, Academy of Science); Professor Hugh van Skyhawk (Mainz University) presently is teaching at the QAU. Among the geographers Prof. Fred Scholz (Berlin FU) stands out with his study of the tribes of Baluchistan, Professor Hans-Georg Bohle (then Freiburg University) worked on people’s coping with disasters; presently Professor Hermann Kreutzmann

(Berlin University) comes with a group of students to Pakistan every year. Professor Matthias Wineger (Bonn University) and Professor Marcus Nüsser (SAI-HU) have been studying glacial movements in the Karakorum and in the Western Himalayas – an important topic with relevance for social science in the times of climate change.

Professor Michael Jansen (RWTH Aachen University) reconstructed the findings of the excavations in Moenjo Daro. As a man of architectural history he taught us what to make out of the archaeological findings. We still need to know more about the reasons of decline and erosion of such a great civilization. The puzzle obviously is more complex than commonly assumed. More insight is especially sought on the social organization of the early societies of this country. Maybe we can draw lessons from Pakistan's past for how to react to catastrophes. Not a social scientist in the strict sense, but a person with wide ranging knowledge and interests who became the personification of German scholarship in Pakistan, has been Professor Mult. Annemarie Schimmel (Harvard and Bonn). The famous orientalist over decades came to Pakistan and taught and wrote about the country and its language, i.e. Urdu. Nobody in Germany could raise so much interest in Pakistan, its culture and society as she did. The list is far from complete. Not all contacts led to lasting cooperation. Quaid-e-Azam University, Punjab University, Peshawar University and the Agricultural University in Faisalabad in Pakistan and the German universities in Heidelberg, Berlin and Göttingen see a steady exchange of social scientists.

### **ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH ASIA- striking similarities**

As an outsider who comes regularly to Pakistan and has worked in different capacities and in different institutions, I have particularly fascinated the opportunity of comparing the different systems within a region which share so much of their history but still have their very distinct societies. There are some striking similarities, but not in all fields.

First, academic institutions all over South Asia focus much more on teaching and less on research as compared to academic institutions in my country, i.e. Germany. Teaching in South Asia is more “frontal”: Teacher talks, student listens. There is less interaction. Bachelor and Master degrees not necessarily require a dissertation. Students are less used to express themselves in discussion, seminars and oral examinations. Where teaching and discussion is not in the mother tongue, students face difficulties expressing themselves and seek help from “model” answers, available from books and magazines that promise shortcuts to knowledge and success. External evaluation in principle should guarantee certain minimum standards, but often leads to highly predictable standard questions. Since employability depends more and more on grades, teachers' attempts at trying to be helpful to their students by giving better marks devalue the whole grading system. In short, the system is least suited to develop independent and novel thinking as is required in research.

Second, in South Asia, it appears that the size of the country and its openness also determines the value people give to their own institutions. India, the most populous of the South Asian countries, could never expect to have the growing number of university teachers educated abroad. A policy of swaraj and self-reliance, the erosion of wealth of the old elite and repeated depreciations of the Rupee meant that only few advanced

students could afford higher studies abroad; the number of scholarships and fellowships did not increase at the same speed as the number of prospective applicants. Large scale nationalisation meant that the number of attractive positions outside the government sector remained limited; an ambitious industrialization and arms programme created jobs in science and technology. As a result, academia became fairly competitive, including arts and social science. Under these conditions most degrees come from India's own academic institutions; to have an Indian PhD is totally acceptable; it is rather that academics returning to the country with foreign degrees find it difficult to get a proper position because they lost contacts over the years of absence from the country and/or they face difficulties having their foreign degrees accepted. This is very different in Pakistan, where foreign scholarships were available, whenever the country enjoyed good relations with the major donors. More than once I did experience that local PhDs were treated with suspicion, if not contempt. Still the number of qualified persons is limited, as those who obtained their degrees from outside often decide to leave the country and take up a job abroad. The situation in the other South Asian countries is different in that their own capacities are much more limited and their relations with India are better. As a consequence you find many senior university teachers in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka who obtained their higher degrees from India as these are more prestigious than their own degrees.

Third, the world over, the market for advanced studies in social science seems to be more and more degree driven. The degree, however, is not an end in itself. In principle it should be yard stick for employers. The number of posts for qualified academics, unfortunately, is restricted. Especially in research, there are few attractive permanent positions.

Fourth, what exists in Pakistan (and more so in Bangladesh), however, is a huge market for consultancy work for the government, aid agencies and others. The role of the NGOs here is less as an alternative to the GOs, i.e. government organizations, but as a complement. This is because smaller action oriented private initiatives aimed at cultural or social tasks, needs little research: People know the problems they are dealing with and try to keep their overhead costs as low and the number of personnel as small as possible, but as NGOs grow in size and their work becomes more complex, the task of gathering information and making decisions becomes more difficult. In principle, the necessary analysis can be done in-house by own staff instead of being outsourced to consultancy firms that are often – quite confusingly – are labelled NGOs. Since few NGOs can raise their funds themselves, they apply to other NGOs or, in the last instance, to national and international governments and government organizations. That this is true you can see from the last US support package for Pakistan under the PEACE Act that demands that US assistance has to be channelled through NGOs wherever possible. Private donations in many countries are tax exempt, which simply means, that in the last instance taxpayers are refunding private donors.

Fifth, applications for projects and funds have to be well armed with statistical evidence and the outcome of "research". Irrespective how good such research is, it is not necessarily gathered in a systematic way (like being part of a larger research agenda); it is also not easily available to the public and/or the research community. Moreover, since such writing serves a particular purpose, namely to enlarge the basis for decision making, action oriented programmes and projects, method and language of such reports do not necessarily reflect academic standards, even if the quality is excellent,

if measured by the requirements of the respective project or programme. Language and style often address only an inside group. Jargon may be used just out of carelessness; in many cases it reflects the wish to address an in-group and to make it sound “professional”. There is no need, however, to much referencing in a report, and under certain conditions cut and paste helps to reduce costs. It reduces, however, the value of such studies for research.

Sixth, there are only few larger research institutes in social science in Pakistan. In economics there are two, in other disciplines of social science there seem to be even fewer. Nadeem ul Haq and Mahmood Hasan Khan a decade ago wrote in Shahrukh Rafi Khan’s “Fifty years of Pakistan’s economy” (2000-Oxford University Press) an excellent analysis of the economics discipline in Pakistan and the situation does not seem to have changed much. This might be mainly because the underlying conditions for research have remained the same. This especially applies to the labour market. As one professor of physics of Quaid-e-Azam University explained to me decades ago when he just had handed in his resignation: It was not just that he would earn so much more abroad, it was even more that he did not feel taken serious as an academic in his own country.

Seventh, economic and political conditions have a direct impact on social science research. If one plans to find an academic job outside of his/her country, he/she specializes in areas that have a market and that will increase his/her value. Therefore, he/she will try to publish in prestigious journals abroad. And if he/she wants to place his/her article in such a journal, he/she better sees first what kind of articles these journals are interested in. The 1980s and 1990s were the high time of econometrics. Given the scarcity and unreliability of data available in Pakistan and the high cost of collection data of a large sample, less econometric refinement might have done to analyse burning social issues in Pakistan. The question, however, would be, whether such studies would have helped to find a teaching position outside the country. Quantitative studies with few and cautiously worded conclusions, did save one also from the risks that a more outspoken critique of government politics might pose, especially in times of military rule. I remember having been first encouraged to translate my PhD thesis on regional development in Pakistan into English, but when my colleagues found out what it was about, they told me that they would be interested only in the methodological part. Principal components still is a standard method for quantitative studies and even then was well documented in every better statistics textbook. So I decided to publish my results somewhere else. It turned out that a parallel study had been done by another foreigner who first was asked to hand in his manuscript for publications and then never heard anything again from his Pakistani host institute.

I have been lining out these facts in order to show that there are good economic and political reasons for some of the research shortcomings here. The result would be that the choice of research methods reflects not just the state of research. It also reflects the general conditions for and perceptions of research.

## **AREAS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH IN PAKISTAN**

A century ago the motto of the Bauhaus Movement was that less is more and that form follows function. The state of social science research, the choice of topics and methods reflect the general climate for research. In line with Say’s Law that every supply creates its own demand one can observe in Pakistan that research follows data

availability. In social sciences, this would explain the large number of quantitative studies in demography and foreign trade. If research would follow research needs, other topics would capture more attention, but this depends on who is determining the needs.

Looking back to the 2010 floods, one would see the need for a major endeavour to study Pakistan's ability to absorb "external" shocks and to prevent and manage natural disasters. Traditional systems of self-help and assistance are still intact, so why is it so difficult to organize things on a larger scale? These problems need an interdisciplinary and integrated approach: Take water as an example: As we know, water is not a homogenous good. Its physical, chemical and other qualities vary over space and time; as a flow resource it is subject to formal and informal regulation; it is a scarce resource that seldom is allowed to develop its own price; it is a transnational resource. This country is the lower riparian of most of its rivers and as such subject to the dealings of the upper riparian's; it is subject to massive government interference; water has its cultural aspects; there are groups of people who have lived on and along the waters for centuries; it is of utmost importance to nutrition, health and irrigation, etc. In a country that depends on irrigation like no other, certainly one would expect more research on this precious item. Many aspects do not fall under "socio-economic" disciplines. But that is the point: All aspects are interlinked and all have their socio-economic implications, if not directly, than indirectly.

From the last sentences it hopefully has become clear, that pigeonholing in academics has to be avoided. As an economist I have greatly benefited from working together with experts in other disciplines, not to forget that economists take pride in adapting research methods from other "lead disciplines" like mathematics, physics, and – of recently – life sciences, i.e. living organisms.

Research interests should not stop at the (imagined) boundaries of one's own subject, they also should not stop at the national borders. Water might serve again as a perfect example. Pakistan's main rivers come from neighbouring countries, i.e. China, India and Afghanistan. Studying these countries' water needs should help to understand their governments' policies. Managing the waters of the Indus Basin has to be compared to the management of other major river systems, like those of the Ganges/Brahmaputra, the Euphrates/Tigris or of the Mekong River. Similarly, environment has its transnational and global aspects.

Looking across the borders is also needed in economics. I always felt that in Pakistan there is a lack of interest in the economies of other countries, especially those who have been on the same level as Pakistan decades ago and now have surpassed it by miles. Conditions might change, as the world economy has undergone sea changes in the past. Simple extrapolations of recent trends can be very misleading. One is remembered of Pakistan's fruitless attempts at recapturing textile markets and how Pakistan lost its early edge in ship wrecking. Pakistan has been surpassed by Bangladesh in garments production and remittances – interesting stuff for analysis.

Pakistan more and more is being discussed as a failing or even a failed state. This obviously also has to be a topic of research. One of the methods would be to try to compare Pakistan's situation with that of other countries which have been in a similar situation. Two countries come to my mind: Turkey and Thailand. Other than India they managed to escape foreign rule, but they also have been highly dependent on the richer,

“developed” countries. Both have their very distinct culture, both have been under military rule directly and indirectly for much of their recent history. Area-wise both of a similar size as Pakistan, their population is less but they still count among the more populous countries in Asia. In both countries a dominant metropolis (Istanbul, Bangkok) towers over the rest of the country. Both performed much better economically and socially than Pakistan. Both have their own problems of integrating minorities (the Kurds in Turkey and the Malay in Thailand). Both are almost throughout monolingual, but still have an increasing percentage of people who know English. Having a closer look at such countries would not be possible without knowing their languages. That would be an option only for a small number of students, but it would be interesting to see the outcome of a direct comparison rather than to rely on research done on Thailand and Turkey by Western scholars.

The world economy is constantly undergoing severe changes. In the last few years, we have seen a major crisis of the world financial markets; the rise of China to become the second largest economy and the largest holder of foreign exchange reserves; rising prices of natural resources (especially oil and gas and food stuff); a rising scepticism viz-a-viz nuclear power; global climate change etc. All of them have their repercussions on Pakistan. To understand the actions of the leading players (including BRIC) one has to study their economic system, policy, history and society. Research on trade has to be more demand and less supply oriented: Bangladesh has surpassed Pakistan as an exporter of readymade garments and knitwear despite the fact that there is hardly any cotton produced in Bangladesh. When I told a Pakistan Minister of Manpower how I was impressed by the emerging ship wrecking industry at Gaddani, he told me that there was no future in this business. Without the necessary government support Pakistan lost its early advantage and the industry moved to India and Bangladesh. I have not seen any study of such missed opportunities.

There are interesting examples of international cooperation in the face of nuclear threat worth to be studied. In the 1970s the Soviet Union and Germany agreed to exchange natural gas for steel pipes. The USSR laid a pipeline from Siberia to Germany with steel pipes delivered by Germany. Even during the coldest days of the Cold War the gas supply functioned with perfection. Going by our experience, it should be possible to trade oil, gas and electric power across Asia. Pakistan, sitting at the crossroads, could benefit from transfer. Research on other countries' experience should be worthwhile.

Finally, it should be profitable to do more research on research itself: Not only who is doing what and how much has been published, but also how research results find entry into policy making and teaching. If it does not exist already: A well monitored web site for social science research findings might be helpful. It would be much cheaper than a printed journal and would be instantly accessible everywhere. As for methods, short lectures/films on relevant methods and their application could be put on the same platform or on YouTube. Given the language limitations of students, explanations should be given in English and Urdu. Some quality control might help which could be exacted by the HEC or by academic institutions in the country assigned by the HEC. It also would help if Government funding of research would be granted under two conditions, i.e. (i) that a part of the research grant is spent on reviewing and editing the results in order to improve their readability and marketability and (ii) that at least a summary of the findings would be published in Urdu. It would help students with

a limited command of English to choose articles worth the effort of reading in a difficult language. Finally, the translation of selected research reports into Urdu would help to reach a wider audience and to teach them good academic practices.

Central to all efforts should be the question “What do we want to know, that we do not know already? And why? And what would be the most suitable way, i.e. the best method, to achieve such knowledge? In the end I want to quote Professor Lawrence Klein, the Nobel prize winner, who many years ago disappointed his captive audience in Islamabad, with his advice: “In the long run, there is no substitute for hard labour and work ethos.”