

Consolidated Research Themes for Thematic Research Grant Program 2009-10

Introduction

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Pakistan (SSHRCPP), Higher Education Commission (HEC), has been established to create a permanent forum to look into affairs of Social Sciences and Humanities for constant and timely research and development. The Council, first of its kind in the government sector, promotes academic development and research in Social Sciences and Humanities. A secretariat of the SSHRCPP with modern facilities is also being developed to assist potential researchers and scholars.

Moreover, the SSHRCPP promotes research by providing funding for research and development in all fields of Social Sciences and Humanities. The Council aims at providing opportunities to researchers to enhance their capabilities and share their experience through various programs. The ultimate objective of the research thus conducted is to provide inputs to governmental and non-governmental organizations in the area of social sector.

To achieve the vision of the SSHRCPP, the following objectives are being pursued:

- Building research capacities of universities, and their staff and students;
- Expanding opportunities for young researchers to conduct meaningful research;
- Promoting academic discourse, debate, and professionalism among social scientists;
- Promoting a research culture through journals, conferences, seminars, competitive research grants, peer reviews, and international collaborations and linkages; and
- Developing rigorous Masters and PhD programs for ensuring quality of output.

Background

The establishment of the SSHRCPP was based on the realization that there was a dire need for expanding Pakistan's social sciences and humanities research base by developing a core of social scientists apt at collecting empirical evidence and conducting critical analysis. Experts at the HEC also realized that the focus of most of the current social sector research remained economic indicators, while important sociological dimensions – such as social relations, social stratification, and social interaction, all key to understanding society and culture – were missing from the scholarly discourse. Hence, it appeared inevitable to make a concrete effort to ensure that a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to research was promoted. The SSHRCPP established a sub-committee to develop the Thematic Research Grant Program for 2009-10.

Under the Thematic Research Grant Program, the SSHRCPP is inviting proposals in three areas. Their details are as follows:

THEME 1: Ethnicity, Cohesion, and Politics of National Integration

Ethnicity

The research and debate on ethnicity in Pakistan has captured neither the complexity of the issue nor the vastly changed demographic map of the country characterized by historical patterns of migration and urbanization – movement of labor from rural and tribal areas to industrialized zones – since the independence. As a result of these two processes of pre-industrial inter-regional migration in the Indus valley, and the post-independence movement of labor to industrializing cities, Pakistan now presents a very different ethnic picture than the existing understanding of the subject or scholarship, which is limited, can really portray.

Any research on ethnicity in Pakistan cannot miss two facts. One, the ethnic groups in Pakistan are interwoven into themselves and largely interspersed with patches of density. Second, each province is multiethnic in character. There are larger and smaller ethnic groups in each province, and none of them is exclusive in terms of ethnicity. The land, resources, and social and political power are shared with the dominant ethnic group claiming the larger share. But the accommodation among ethnic groups due to weak democratic and mediating political institutions has been problematic, giving rise to conflict over power and resources.

Ethnic migration from one province or part of the country to another also signifies an integration process leading to a broader demographic mix. It creates new social networks among people belonging to different language and ethnic groups, making them more sensitive to the cultural identity of other social groups. This trend is particularly visible in major cities of Pakistan, such as Karachi, Lahore. All major cities and even old cities like Peshawar, as well as economically developing cities and towns, have a greater ethnic mix today than they had at the time of the independence. The ethnic mix is the result of economic factors, as alluded above, attracting labor force from distant places. The case of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), the Northern Areas, and the Tribal Areas needs to be mentioned. Their relative underdevelopment and population growth has pushed large populations from these regions to live and work in other parts of the country, particularly in urban Sindh and most parts of Punjab.

Cohesion

In ethnic studies, the issue of national cohesion, which exists at several levels, has been ignored. Rather divisive issues of group and ethnic identities, and loyalties, and sub-nationalism get greater attention. Most scholars have ignored how historical trends over centuries have contributed to a deeper sense of belonging to the Indus valley region, which we believe is a natural-historical bond among all ethnic communities.

Many layers of cohesiveness bind various communities and regions of Pakistan. However, the historical narrative, sociological perspective, and geo-economic factors that

have shaped the integrative process of the regions that now comprise Pakistan have hardly got the scholarly attention that they deserve. In our view, the following factors have created a sense of cohesiveness and need to be the subject of scholarly studies:

Indus valley as a common resource region

It is ironical, and perhaps intriguing, that the natural-historical bind of Pakistan – the Indus valley – is totally missing from the national discourse and ethnic studies of Pakistan. This creates a wrong impression as if the ethnic groups and the region and provinces that formed Pakistan did not exist before 1947. That is an important date in our political journey as a nation state, but the peoples, ethnic groups and regions have been living together for thousand of years.

Even if we consider the history of the last millennium, these regions have been together under various empires and kingdoms. This included the entire Afghanistan under the Mughal rule. The reign of the Persian empires existed over large parts of what is Pakistan and then the Muslim Sultanate of Delhi held these areas together. There can be some variations, but most of these regions were part of the same economic and political order.

The water and agricultural resources of the Indus are commonly shared now, more so because of the canal system built by the British. Even before the network of canals was laid down, the regions depended on the agricultural product of the areas close to the Indus river system. Today, all the provinces of Pakistan depend on Indus water; not only do they share the waters but also other communal agricultural resources, making the country a unified market of grains, vegetables and fruits. Industrial and other forms of economies have also created interdependence.

Culture

In the ethnic studies, we see greater emphasis on distinctive cultural characteristics of ethnic groups of Pakistan. Undoubtedly, all ethnic groups have distinct cultures and, in some respects, cultural variations are quite stark. There are three forces that shape the culture of a society: religion, customs and traditions, and language. Never have cultures been a fixed category. All cultures are path-dependent, and the paths on which they take different directions or intermingle and create a new national culture are economic development, national language, migration and the media. Cultures change over time. There has been a Pakistani culture in the making for hundreds of years, and not only since the independence. We can explore the influence of each of these forces.

Religion in our case provides the core values of culture, which is not just the way people dress up on special occasions. It embraces all aspects of living, feeling, and relating to other peoples. The adoption of Urdu as our national language was one of the boldest and most imaginative tool used for nation-building and national integration, though controversial in relation to the Bengali majority. The language issue in respect of East Pakistan was corrected with Bengali being the second national language.

Today, greater numbers of Pakistanis speak Urdu and almost everyone with very rare exceptions understands Urdu. Urdu, which was a natural candidate for our national language, had roots in the Muslim identity in the subcontinent and was the language of Muslim literate class in the Punjab and the medium of instruction at the school level in

the NWFP, Balochistan and parts of Sindh. Urdu is now lingua franca of the country. Pakistani Urdu has another important aspect in terms of how it is has borrowed from other regional languages and English in particular. Television plays for the last forty years had played a great role in regionalization of Urdu.

Another important aspect of Urdu based culture which is missing in our studies is how families belonging to other language groups have adopted Urdu as their mother tongue. It is more visible as a trend in Punjab. With increased economic and social mobility in Punjab parents have started to speak Urdu with their children. Same is the case of second and third generation migrants from Balochistan, the NWFP, and other areas who have migrated to major cities out of their own provinces.

There are other cultural layers too; for example, the way people dress. *Shalwar qameez* – which Zulfikar Ali Bhutto popularised as the *awami libas* – is now truly a national outfit, transcending ethnic and regional boundaries. The *awami libas* was originally known in the subcontinent as the Pathan suit. Baloch tribes traditionally wore this dress. Now it has been adopted by the Punjabis, Sindhis and various immigrant communities from India. We need to explore the Pakistani cuisine and how it is similar all over the country with some regional variations. Same is true for marriage ceremonies that are similar across the Pakistani urban landscape, with some variations in the rural areas.

Identity

There is too much intellectual rhetoric on the identity crisis of the country without explaining what it really means. Like all other developing countries, more in the sub-continental fashion, Pakistani is, as pointed out earlier, multicultural. But Indus valley has been a melting pot of cultures, religions and languages for thousands of years.

No country in the world today can claim to have a singular identity; every major country is diverse in terms of languages, sub-cultures and social groups. But social diversity that we have is not a problem, the way it has been stated by some intellectuals and foreign scholars with little understanding of our society, history and many overlapping bonds of culture and religion. Identity is always multilayered, meaning an individual can have more than one identity: caste, tribe, ethnicity, sect, religion, language, etc. Also, identity is always contextualized, meaning in which context an individual expresses his or her identity.

For instance, a Baloch in relation to a Sindhi may be a Baloch, but among the Balochs he or she is identified as a member of a particular group. Therefore, identity issue, which is sometime overplayed, is not to be seen as a problem, but rather a normal state of affairs, which is not unique to Pakistan. The issue of Pakistani identity however needs to be researched more meaningfully than it has been so far. It has two contexts; historical forces that contributed to the Muslims' sense of being a separate community, and the historical and geographical contours of the Indus valley, including its pre-Islamic past. Reference to the ancientness of our land is completely missing in our national and historical narrative.

Other countries have profited in many ways from showing how old they are. It is not to assert with a spirit of nationalism that we are an old nation with a relatively new political title of Pakistan, but with a sense of historicity. A project on the pattern of Professor

Ainslie Embree's 'Pakistan's search for identity' is thus recommended. Importantly, it must take multiple factors into account by applying a multidisciplinary approach.

National Integration

National integration is a slow process. Generally, it is driven by invisible forces of economic migration and assimilation of groups as they change places of domicile. For quite a while they maintain their group identity and language, but immerse themselves over time into the larger group identity as they cut their links with the village and the tribe and their cultural individuality fades off. In the first place they are forced by the language of the market or the common space to learn it, otherwise they cannot operate. Just think of the Pashtuns in any part of the country and how they have learnt Urdu mainly for economic reasons.

But national integration process cannot be left to the invisible historical forces; they would work under any circumstances. The integration can be, and in our case, must be stimulated by a willful and well-designed political and cultural framework. We have an excellent cultural framework in Islam and Urdu language, which we can continue to use more effectively balancing them with the ethnic and regional diversity issues.

Politics is the major instrument through which national integration can be promoted. The ethnic diversity that we have is not a problem as explained above; it just needs an appropriate political framework. What can that be? It must have three elements woven into it, or three simple principles: autonomy (of provinces), representation (of peoples), and empowerment (of social communities). Unfortunately, military authoritarianism violated the legislative-normative framework that we absolutely needed to integrate our nation. It stood against the fundamentals of democracy (representation), against federalism (autonomy), and against genuine empowerment (because of selective co-optation). As we put ourselves back on the rails of democracy, we need to attend to these principles by asking ourselves a question; how would these elements promote national integration.

Suggested studies and projects

In the light of discussion of various aspects of ethnicity, cohesion and national integration, we need to promote research in the following areas:

1. Multidisciplinary research on Pakistani culture, culture formation, and the composite character of Pakistani culture. We need to encourage projects that emphasize unity themes, commonalities and the common forces that shape Pakistani culture and regional cultural variants.
2. The role of Urdu as a national language and how it has become truly a national language. Projects can document social groups and families both in urban and rural setting that have actually switched to Urdu over time. Similar projects can be taken with reference to each ethnic group, to show the percentage of people that can speak or understand Urdu and compare it what was the situation 60 years ago.
3. Projects on successful integration need to be promoted. The most important example is that of the Pashtuns. The demand for Pashtunistan looks uncalled for

today with so much integration of the Pashtuns into the power structure of the country (military, bureaucracy, and business), and the trans-regional migration of the Pashtuns. It is an important question how openness to internal migration and creation of economic opportunities in different parts has generated larger national stakes, killing the sub-national project. The same is true of the Balochs. Today, more Balochs live outside their province than any time in history. They are in large numbers in urban and rural Sindh, southern and western Punjab, and southern NWFP. The whole debate on Pashtun and Baloch ethnicity needs to be refashioned in light of migration and demographic changes and how economics, particularly, creation of a national market and participation in the elite networks has promoted their integration.

4. Rethinking the search for national identity is of utmost importance. As discussed earlier, we need to trace the trajectory of Muslim identity and tie it up with the Indus valley region, which became a concentration zone of Muslims, and without which the dream of Pakistan could not have materialized. It is a multidisciplinary project that can look at history, culture, civilization, religion, languages and many other bonds that contribute to national identity, essentially being multilayered. Its Pakistani character must be rooted in Indus valley region and superstructure of Islam and Islamic civilization.
5. Ethnic grievances need to be probed, and myth needs to be separated from reality. The politicization of ethnicity is essentially politically motivated: to demand rights, seek representation or enlarge groups' entitlements. Scholarly research in this area needs to be independent, objective, and factual, so that vested ethnic interests do not capture the debate.
6. The three forces that shape national integration process – democracy, federalism, and empowerment of social communities – must be part of the vision of ethnic research.

THEME 2: Family in Transition, Technology, and Social Change

There is a need for focused thematic research, both by scholars of eminence as well as budding scholars, on multidisciplinary issues facing Pakistan today. A major theme in this regard is ‘Families in transition, technology, and social change.’ Understandably, each one of the three components of the theme taken separately, together or in any combination can lead to discussion and can form basis for research topics. Some of the salient ones are as follows:

Globalization and Social Change

The research will entail an analysis of the present socioeconomic and political climate of the country, the pressures for political, economic and even cultural change in Pakistan. This is important because inadequate infrastructure, poverty, lack of good governance and stability, political uncertainty, and social conflicts in the systems and structures lead to difficulties in identifying the multifaceted social change. This is compounded by the huge economic cost of ethnic and social tensions arising in Karachi, reflecting the multidimensional issues the country is facing. The efforts of the government for providing security, freedom, and self-reliance face far bigger and unpredictable challenges.

Languages, Schooling, and Communication

Language usage is perhaps the best indicator of social change. Change reflected through language plays an important role in defining all kinds of social interactions. The scope of this sub-theme ranges from language used for teaching and learning to communication in media (television, radio, Internet, mobile phones, cinema, etc.) and global businesses.

Gender and Women’s Issues

Particularly in the last decade or so, many programs have been launched for women’s emancipation and political participation, but at the same time there have been cases of physical and psychological humiliation of women. The verbal discourse carried out as part of political and ideological campaigns led to a divided society (perhaps a schizophrenic society). Therefore, it would be worth examining the visual representations dating from those periods and compare or contrast them with the verbal texts, television programs, theatre, television serials, etc. This is keeping in view the fact that written, verbal, and visual discourse is amenable to analysis, thereby indicating a reliable measure of social change.

Family in Transition: Challenges, Difficulties, and Strategies

Transformations and transitions in families affect family structures and relationships. Further, the complexities of family dynamics occur at multiple levels, with ethnicity, religion, language, class, gender roles, and other cultural manifestations yet to be clearly

understood. Parenting itself becomes a major challenge with dwindling support (familial, social, and economic). The stories of self immolation, of selling children, of child molestation, of runaway children, of drug abuse and behavior problems in children, of broken marriages, of children of divorce parents, of children raised without fathers (fathers abroad), and innumerable other issues clearly indicate families in transition are a challenge for social scientists. There is need to study the role of the intact families, presence of fathers, affect of work on mothers and their families, and poverty and its consequences for families.

Technology, Education, and Social Change

The transition in the classrooms and teaching methodologies, which were brought in with the advent of technology and global employability of graduates of our universities, are among the many areas that need to be investigated. These have brought about a significant change in what is demanded and delivered. This has also led to a change in the political culture of fear, intolerance, and widespread complacency in the universities. We need to study the existing cultures, practices, and politics of our universities, as well as transformations taking place (and their direction). Social sciences and humanities have faced death by suffocation at universities aimed for developing only entrepreneurs, business graduates or scientists/technologists. The philosophical discourse and politics of freedom of expression has been lulled. The minds and intellect are not stimulated but obstructed, thus the potential of development of universities and idealistic higher education systems remain an elusive dream.

Demography and Sustainable Human Development

There is enough evidence to substantiate the connection between demography and sustainable human development. Through research and experience, social scientists have come to believe that population trends influence development patterns the world over. Higher population growth rates have caused disparity between needs and resources, augmenting economic burden for the poor and the disadvantaged, including women and minorities; forcing migrations; fueling extremism and violence; and straining the environment. Pakistan is definitely a case in point; however, research from this perspective is sparse. In order to make valuable contributions to policy formulation for meeting the human resource development needs and addressing the problem of population and development, research is required in many areas. Some of those areas are categorised in the following sub-themes.

Urbanization, Environment, and Sustainable Development

Unplanned and haphazard urbanization is creating various socioeconomic and cultural problems in Pakistan. It is a complex process of transformation centered on individuals and households, but influenced by multiple factors, including the interchanging and upgrading of physical and social infrastructure. There is a need to explore factors contributing to urbanization and affecting the quality of life in the urban areas. For example, due to overcrowding in the urban areas, environmental problems are increasing.

Moreover, there has been a mushroom growth of slums in big cities. These factors are resulting in environmental degradation and depletion of natural and human resources. Therefore, there is a need to conduct research into how these issues of urbanization could be dealt with and what strategies should be developed for sustainable human development.

Demographic Transition and Aging Population

Since Pakistan is in a demographic transition with relatively high fertility and mortality rates and increasing life expectancy, an increasing number of elderly people are becoming a major challenge to policy makers. According to UN estimates, the number of Pakistanis aged 60 and over is about 11 million. Undoubtedly, population aging will create new economic and social pressures. This issue needs to be addressed keeping in view demographic patterns, changing family structures, women employment, and labor market.

Old age is supposed to be linked with poor health, so there is a need to conduct research on elderly people with reference to their geriatric care, role of family and community in taking care of the elderly, and the availability of health services for meeting the needs of the elderly. Economic challenges because of the increasing number of elderly people need to be met by addressing issues of pension, social security, and availability of age-sensitive goods and services in the market. Findings of these researches will provide the policymakers with empirical data on the number and needs of elderly people, thus

helping them to formulate age-sensitive and flexible policies and develop strategies and mechanisms to cater to the needs of elderly people.

Demographic Dividend: One Time Opportunity for Pakistan

Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world. But, after reaching its highest, the country's population growth trend is now gradually declining. This demographic transition reflects a very interesting window of opportunity. Today, Pakistan is one of the countries that are not only rich in terms of natural resources, but also have a large pool of human resource: young population, those aged between 10 and 29, comprises 43 percent of the country's total population. This demographic scenario demands immediate attention of the policymakers to maximize this dividend by productively absorbing this youth in national and global market.

Research shows that the population growth rate is rapidly declining in many Western and some East Asian countries, reflecting a negative trend. These countries are fulfilling their human resource requirements through immigration from developing countries. Many developing countries, having high population growth rate and insufficient natural resources, have thus capitalized on this opportunity by successfully converting their population pressure into the finest human capital.

In realization of the global demand for human resources, these countries trained their youth according to the national, regional and global needs. Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan are examples of countries that have not only reduced their economic burden but have also gained financially by sending demand-specific, professionally trained human force to the Middle East, Asian and European countries, and ensured their economic growth and social development. Thus, Pakistan may also prepare a policy response to such demographic trends and related employment expectations by focusing on the creation of a knowledge society.

Poverty, Inequality, and Vulnerability

Despite several public policy initiatives, poverty remains a major challenge in Pakistan: almost one third of the country's population lives below the poverty line (BPL) according to most estimates. There is growing evidence that the poor can solve their problems if they are given fair access to financial and business development services (Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is a significant example in this regard). Therefore, there is a pressing need to study underlying factors contributing to poverty. For example, there is a need to bring into focus inequalities and injustices that result in lack of education, poor health, and low levels of skill development among the poor, and eventually perpetuate poverty from generation to generation.

Moreover, there is a need to develop a participatory poverty approach to understanding the perspective of the poor on poverty. These participatory studies would help explore assets of the poor, their risk-management capacities, their support networks, their marginalization and vulnerability in adverse circumstances, and opportunities available to them in the main socioeconomic stream of life.

Findings of these studies will provide an understanding of the perspective of the poor, and how they manage their meagre resources and deprivations. This understanding would

help the policymakers in devising strategies that reduce vulnerability of the poor, build their capacities, and make use of their capabilities and skills.

Gender, Reproductive Health, and Development

Reproductive health issues still need attention in Pakistan, despite the growing concern of the government and different civil society organizations regarding creating awareness about them among women. This issue needs to be addressed by the level of exclusion of women from the main socioeconomic stream of life. The two major questions in this regard are: 1) how this exclusion further leads to gender discrimination by disempowering women from taking decisions about their health in general and reproductive health in particular?; and 2) what interventions are needed to bring women on a par with men to enable them to negotiate their reproductive rights? Hopefully, research in these areas would provide some concrete policy recommendations for improving the status of women and empower them, besides promoting gender equality.

THEME 3: Extremism and Violence

Extremism and Sectarianism are on the rise, not only nationally but globally. Pakistan has been criticized as a host country, proliferating extremism and sectarianism detrimental to peace and development. The Pakistani society is facing extremism of many kinds; for example, spousal violence, interpersonal violence, political violence, collective violence, etc. Violence is the source of many problems and complications, such as erosion of rule of law, human rights violations, and suppression of individual freedoms. Therefore, there is a need to conduct research into how Pakistan could be made a low violence society. Studies should be undertaken to identify socioeconomic factors that give rise to ethnic and sectarian violence. This will help the policymakers to design such interventions in the socioeconomic sector that mitigate the influence and impact of such factors. Those social factors shall be studied that promote cohesion and integration by consciously making them an integral part of social sector uplift plans.

Human Rights for the Marginalized

Racial, gender, and religious discrimination creates an underclass whose human rights are routinely violated. It is not that they are legally or constitutionally discriminated, but they are stigmatized and therefore covertly denied opportunities for education and economic competition. As a result, members of these classes remain socially excluded and marginalized. There is a need to conduct research on socially disadvantaged populations, such as the religious minorities, the physically handicapped, the uncared-for elderly people, the shelterless and the politically excluded.

Information Revolution and Social Development

There has been an information revolution in Pakistan. Information technology gadgets – such as cellular phones, the Internet, calculators, CDs, DVDs, etc. – have changed the whole information landscape of the society. The researches may explore what are the social implications of this revolution and how this information abundance could be used for social development and economic empowerment?