Rights of Children in Islam: Some Socio-Medical Aspects

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Abstract

Children are facing many problems in Pakistan. They have been the victim of violence (killing), deprived of education, and compelled to forced labor. They are suffering from many health hazards. The present article considers some of the factors about the alarming situation before 1970 and after. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2021), the literacy rate in 1970 was around 21%, which increased to approximately 58% by 2020, but with major disparities in access. This has been attributed to the lack of faith-based education in the schools.

Keywords: Rights, Islam, Children, Violence, Medico-social aspects

Introduction:

Ali and Farooq (2022) argue that faith-based education plays a vital role in character building and social cohesion, advocating for a balanced integration of religious and secular curricula. However, during the last 3 or 4 decades, violence has taken the whole world into its grip. Killing people on a mass scale has become so easy a matter of daily occurrence that it has frightened all peace-loving people at the global level. In addition to the killing of children in the mosque and other educational institutions through drone attacks, the accidental killing of innocent children at the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar in December 2015 has alarmed the parents. The killing of children in Kashmir and especially Palestine recently has posed many questions. While pondering these questions, this paper also critically

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examines some aspects of educational systems. The prevalent educational system during the last seven decades or so has had a direct bearing on what is happening in Pakistan.

It is within this context that this research seeks to explore the relationship between education and children's rights, particularly focusing on how shifts in educational policies have shaped the moral, social, and intellectual development of Pakistani youth. It thoroughly examines the historical transformations in Pakistan's education system and their effects on children's moral upbringing to find the correlation between faith-based education and the ethical development of children. The core research questions guiding this study are: How has the evolution of Pakistan's education system impacted children's moral and social development? What role does faith-based education play in shaping children's ethical behavior? And how can educational reforms address issues related to violence and deprivation among children?

By understanding how past educational frameworks have influenced children's rights and moral values, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational reform in Pakistan. Additionally, it provides policymakers, educators, and scholars with insights into the necessity of a values-driven education system that fosters social responsibility and ethical consciousness.

Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing content analysis of historical education policies and a review of primary sources such as old textbooks and curricula. Archival research on pre- and post-1970 educational policies, newspaper articles, and government reports is utilized for data collection. The year 1970 has been chosen as a comparative parameter due to significant shifts in Pakistan's educational policies and socio-political landscape. During the early years of

Pakistan's independence, the educational curriculum retained many elements from pre-partition systems, including a strong emphasis on moral and ethical teachings.

However, after 1970, rapid globalization, policy changes, and economic constraints led to significant modifications in the education system. The nationalization of educational institutions in 1972, followed by the privatization wave in the 1990s, created disparities in access to quality education. These changes contributed to a fragmented system with varying ideological influences, impacting children's social and moral development. By comparing the pre- and post-1970 periods, this study aims to assess the correlation between educational reforms and the changing nature of children's rights in Pakistan. Finally, thematic analysis is applied to identify recurring patterns in the role of education in children's moral and social rights.

A Brief Background of the Present-Day Education System in Pakistan:

As Rahman (2017) explains, British colonial policies in education intentionally shifted pedagogical focus from indigenous knowledge to Western frameworks, weakening the role of faith-based ethics in education. The East India Company came to the Indian Subcontinent as a trader in 1612. During the Muslim Kings, Persian and Arabic languages were used throughout the subcontinent. After the failure of the Independence Movement in 1857, the Crown took over the charge of this land in 1877. They introduced many "Reforms." The crux of such "Reforms" was abolishing the Persian/Arabic languages and replacing the English language. As such, the British were successful in producing "A class of people who were Indian by birth but English by mind" (Macaulay, 1935). However, not going into the details, it suffices to say that the British were able to produce a sizeable number of "Anglo-Indians" and "Anglo-Muhammadans" whose brought-up share of "Indians" and "Muhammadans" was just nominal (Maududi, 1982).

After the sad demise of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the civil and military class and many politicians took over the country. The educational system continues to be the same as during colonial times. However, from 1947-1975 or so, there used to be a system where the school started with the morning assembly. All the students recited Iqbal's poem "Yearnings of a Child" (بچوں کی دُعا) (Iqbal, 1995). It may be seen that the children in the form of a course used to recite the following poem;

"May my life be a light-giving torch for the others?

May the darkness of the world fly away in the face of my life efforts?

Every corner of the world may light up in the face of the bright shine I emit.

May my life serve as a decoration means for my country?

Just as flowers give beauty to the garden.

May my life take the form of a light beetle?

In the love of light of knowledge, I may have liked it.

May I devote my life to the help of the poor?

May I devote myself to the pain-stricken and weaklings?

O my God, save me from sin and put me on the righteous path.

This poem has some Islamic virtues and ethical norms embedded in its stanzas, as indicated below:

Life is like a torch; ambition to do away with darkness from the world; elimination of ignorance; patriotism/love for the homeland; the role of a light beetle producing light in the darkness; service to the poor, destitute, and old people; and adopting the right path. The repetition of the above Islamic ethics and norms was inscribed in their mind for almost 10 years, ultimately culminating in the form of behavior and attitudes in their adult life. They had been practicing them when they were grown up. This is the reason that we do not find even a single incidence of violence at the national level during this

whole period from 1947-1975 or so. However, during the last about 4 or 5 decades (say 1975 onwards), the scenario changed altogether, and there emerged a mushroom-type crop of many systems of education, about a dozen. The youngsters have been torn apart at the National/Ummah level in many segments. Firstly, those of the elite class in O-level/-levels and Cambridge/Oxford systems. Secondly, a sizeable majority of children go to government schools with the fewest facilities. Thirdly, a good number of students adopted the Madrassa (Religious System of education). Fourthly, those studying in private schools/colleges, the majority belong to the middle or upper-middle class.

Despite the diversified curricula and methods of teaching and training in all these systems, there was one aspect in common, i.e., Iqbal's poem in the daily morning assembly was abolished; each system adopted its own way. Consequent to this drastic change, the young generation became unmindful of all such virtues being imparted to them for a long period through morning assembly. Our educational system has become an imitation of the curriculum of America. This resulted in:

1. Urdu as a national language is not to be implemented as decided in 1979

2. Education has become a "TRADE"; it has become aimless, sabotaging the pious and sacred relationship between the teacher and the taught (Khan & Aftab, 2017).

3. In the name of the advancement of science and technology, the young generation has become disinterested in social sciences. Colleges and Universities have been compelled to close their enrollment for all such subjects. However, it may be interesting to note that in the West, they are spending billions of dollars to impart knowledge of these subjects to their students. For instance, they emphasize the importance of education, including social sciences, for economic growth, highlighting that increased higher education participation can significantly boost GDP (Shah, 2024).

4. Over-emphasis on science subjects (And that too in an unorganized and disintegrated way) has very adversely affected the Islamic morals and ethical values of young people, thus ignoring service to others [Khan, 2022].

5. The ground reality is that all such efforts have produced millions of educated but jobless young people, causing several social, cultural, political, economic, and ethical problems. However, it is encouraging that recently some Muslim intellectuals have discussed the plight of education and some of the very serious implications, which are the root cause of present-day violence, leading to the killing of children in schools and religious institutions (Ahmed, 2017; Ahmed G. M., 1999). Anis Ahmed (2017) has attributed it to the ignorance of the true teaching of Islam (Quran & Sunnah) and the role model of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). He further pointed out that social, political, and economic exploitation during the last four/five decades has created hostile attitudes and irritable behavior among the youth.

6. A cursory look at the above submissions leads us to some of the important goals to be achieved for the young generation of the Muslim Ummah in Pakistan and elsewhere. They are:

- Adopting a unified system of education throughout the country.

- Making youth well-versed with Quran, Hadith, and Seerah right from Primary to College education.

- At the same time, the students are to be apprised of the background of the creation of Pakistan, the objectives and sacrifices of life (men, women, and children), as well as property.

- Last but not least, it may be understood that Islamic teachings are poles apart from every type of extremism. Allah, in very clear terms, has guided His Prophet (P.B.U.H) in the Quran not to perform prayers throughout the whole night, but rather to make it easy [Al Muzammil, 73:1-4]. Similarly, in the case of charity for the sake of Allah, one has been instructed to be moderate,

neither spendthrift nor miser (Al Furqan, 25:66). Quran has even instructed not to be loud in speaking (Al Hujrat, 49:2). It may be seen that if a child is reared having all such guidance from the Quran as well as a role model of the Prophet, could he possibly be expected to take arms in his hands?

Now, probably, the stage has been set to discuss some of the most salient aspects of the socio-medical aspects of the rights of children in Islam.

A study by Siddiqui and Ahmed (2019) found that students who participated in structured morning assemblies, including recitations of moral poetry, displayed higher levels of ethical awareness and civic responsibility. Beyond the reference to *Bachon Ki Dua*, several other historical and contemporary examples illustrate the role of education in shaping children's rights and moral development. This includes **Iqbal's educational philosophy**. His poetry and educational vision emphasized the integration of moral and academic education. His works, such as *Lab Pe Aati Hai Dua Ban Ke Tamanna Meri*, were integral to school assemblies before the structural changes in the 1970s (Iqbal, 1995). Similarly, before the diversification of education in Pakistan, religious seminaries (*Madrassa*) played a crucial role in instilling ethical values. The shift from this unified system to a more segmented approach post-1970 led to varied interpretations of children's moral and social responsibilities (Rahman, 2017). If we compare **Finland's education system**, we can have a better picture. Studies show that countries with integrated moral education, such as Finland, have lower crime rates among youth and higher levels of civic engagement (Helsinki Education Institute, 2018). A similar model was historically present in Pakistan but gradually faded after 1970.

Rights of Children in Islam:

In the previous pages, we have indicated the lack of proper education and training of children. Unfortunately, present-day parents themselves are not practicing what they want their children to do. Parents are the role models for a child, being the most near and dear to them. In early life, a child is dependent on their mother. If, during the early life period, a child is constantly engaged in seeing cartoons, it would hurt their behavior in later life. A cursory look at any series of cartoons would reveal that a child gets the impression of fooling others, cruelty, and being harmful instead of caring, sharing, being kind-hearted, and learning a lesson about serving the poor and needy. Anis Ahmed (2017) observed that after giving such training in violence for 4-5 years, the child is put into the preschool system, where he remains under the "care and custody" of a paid maid having no emotional attachment, affinity, or love for so many children around her. This is the place where children learn to quarrel, abuse, and beat each other, which proves to be the first step in learning violence.

Some Practical Remedial Measures:

The Quran has given the Cardinal rule for the Muslims in Surah As-Saff (As Saff, 61:2-3). ("Oh, you have believed, why do you say that which you do not do? Most hateful it is in the sight of Allah that you should say that which you do not do")

Parents must explain to children the true meaning of Islam as a code of life and practice its teachings. Abdul Wahab Boudhiba (1998) remarks that "Islam pays constant attention to one's own body. A Muslim upbringing is a training that makes one permanently aware of the functioning of the physiological life. Eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, bleeding, vomiting, and cutting hair and nails are some of the daily routine matters. There are ways in which these acts are to be performed, certain gestures to be carried out, and a style to be respected."

It is encouraging to note that recently, some good literature on the rearing of children in Islam has been published [Kalsoom, 2000; Roohi, 2003; Munir, 2018]. Similarly, several other publishers have also published many other books, necessitating that (Hadith, 3138) (Aluwan, 1981)

- The children need to be given good literature in the form of educational magazines and stories of the Prophet and other Muslim heroes. It must be by their age and mental development.

- Muslim parents have a special duty as instructed by the Prophet that "*One who is given by God a child, he should give him/her a meaningful name, should give education and training.*"

- The parents, while teaching the children basic Islamic knowledge, should emphasize the segregation of the sexes (Hadith, 3138, 1200 AD). Free mixing of adult boys and girls is to be avoided at all costs.

- Under the influence of Western culture, many Muslim parents have become unmindful of the dress of children from an early age. This practice leads to carelessness about the limit of *Satar* (Dress Code) when children become adults. The dresses of girls and boys should not be tight and seductive. The girls, when grown up, should have a *Hijab* (Veil/Scarf) while going out of their homes. It is also essential to make the children aware of the commandments of Allah as given in Surah Al-Noor, Al-Ahzab, and other such Surahs having instructions about family life. Co-education has become a common practice in many Muslim countries, it is imperative to abandon this system. The classrooms and other educational functions are to be held separately for boys and girls.

Stages for Imparting Education and Training to Muslim Children:

It may be interesting to note that Abdullah Naishih Aluwan (1981), in his thought-provoking book *"Tarbait – Al Itfal Fil Islam,"* has divided the life of a child into the following stages for education and training.

1. Birth to 3 years
2. Three to Five years
3. Five to Seven Years
4. Seven to 10 Years
5. Ten to Fourteen Years
6. Fourteen to Sixteen Years
7. Adult Age

Some more details about these stages are given below:

1. **Birth to three years:** Nobody could be a better guide than parents. When parents become a guide and friends, a child will not be afraid to ask any questions he/she has in mind. Pre-school children should be taught good habits of hygiene (Washing Hands before and after taking meals) and other rules of behavior.

2. **Three to 5 years:** By this age, a child becomes aware of his own body. All such matters may be discussed directly in a simple manner.

3. **Five to Seven Years:** The children up to this stage are innocent and like clean paper; whatever the parents and teachers write on it, they would retain it as being impressionable. The significance of teaching *"Norani/Baghdadis Quida"* (Primer) is essential at this stage. At this stage, they will be asked to remember some short verses from *Para-30* by heart.

4. **Seven to Ten years:** It is a very crucial stage in a child's life as they are approaching puberty. As such, boys and girls should be informed about the changes (Physical, Emotional, Psychological, and Physiological) about to occur due to puberty. They may be taught separately by some male

and female teachers/doctors, respectively. Islam places more emphasis on the etiquette of privacy and seeing each other. Some details follow:

Privacy:

- The children are told to seek permission while entering the rooms/houses of others, maybe their parents or other elder people in the family. Surah Al Noor (24:58) has specified three times, i.e., before *Fajr,* after *Zohar,* and *after Isha* Prayers. These three times are when the parents may be having some loose clothes.

- Islam has prescribed the proper way of entering someone's house after seeking permission and saying *Salam* to them.

- A Muslim (Boy or Girl) is to refrain from being in a place where he/she is alone with someone of the opposite sex. "The third party at such a place may be *Satan* (Hadith, 1400).

- *Surah Al Ahzab (33:32)* forbids men and women from mixing without necessity. In case of some unavoidable matters like asking for something from women or discussing some educational matter, *Shariah* has prescribed etiquette for interaction between males and females.

- Seeing towards boys of pre-pubescent age (boys lesser than 15 years): Beautiful boys not having grown hair on the face and particularly of affluent class are quite charming and good looking as such, seeing them may initiate lustful emotions in the men as well as women and thus it is forbidden to have company with them. During the present age, it is a common practice amongst rich families that a male servant works in the home. The ladies of such families unduly rely on them and let the children go with them to play or leave them at home in their company. In such cases, these servants may commit sexual violence against the children. The children, due to

shyness and fear, do not mention such matters to their parents, and the practice continues for a long period. In all such cases, parents should be well aware to take notice.

5. **Ten to Fourteen Years:** They are in their final classes of high school, and as such, they can understand every aspect of human life, and they need to be apprised of those aspects of marriage.

6. **14-16 Years Age:** At this stage, the boys and girls become adults. This stage is very critical, and thus, they are ready for marriage. This is the reason that the *Holy Prophet* advised young people to get married. "*Oh, young people, men and women! Whoever can bear the burden of marriage, let him or her be married, it is indeed contentment to the eye and a protection to the modest parts, and whoever cannot, he should fast, as it is a protection for him*" (Sahih al-Bukhari 5066).

After having the general discussion for the youth, now in the following, we shall be discussing some other important aspects of rearing.

Some Islamic Teaching for the Rearing of Children:

Children are the best gift from Allah Almighty. They are a cementing force for keeping spouses close together, thus leading to a highly firm bond of a spiritual relationship. In this context, the mention of a good treatise on the "Islamic perspective of rearing children" by Ummi Kalthum (2006) seems to be a good first effort of its kind. It has been written by a Muslim lady physician in the Urdu language under UNESCO. Some of the most salient points are being discussed here.

- Prophet (P.B.U.H) has described children as "Flowers of the Paradise." Emphasizing the significance of proper care of the children, the Prophet (P.B.U.H) said: *"Good governance is the best of the things which a father can give to his children."*

- The mother during pregnancy should keep herself engaged in the recitation of the Quran while doing home chores, avoiding any stress. Recent research has shown that during pregnancy, anger, stress, and such conditions may have an adverse effect on the physical health and mental development of the child in the uterus.

- Soon after the birth of a child, *Adhan,* along with *Aqamat-e-Takbir,* is said in the year of a child. Some honey is also given as-Sunnah.

- The child should be given a good name, and two or one goat-obliged sheep should be sacrificed within seven days of the birth of a male or female child, respectively. Similarly, circumcision is also a Sunnah for a male child.

- Breastfeeding is not only essential for the health of a child, but it is also an important Islamic practice. The child should, as a matter of fact, be breastfed for 2 years. Islam considers it a "Value" and a special bond, so much so that women other than the real mother, who breastfeed an infant, acquire a special status in Islamic law. It is called "Suckling parenthood," and hence, such a woman is called the "Infant's mother in lactation." Here, a translation of an Ahadith is given below: *Narrated by Aby Tufail; "I saw the Prophet (P.B.U.H) distributing flesh at Jiirranah, as I was a boy in those days bearing the bond of the camel, and when a woman who came forward to approach the Prophet (P.B.U.H) He spread his cloak for her, and she sat on it. I asked 'Who is she?' The people said 'She is the foster mother''* (Hadith, 2171, 900 AD).

- Foster's mother has been given the legal status of Motherhood in certain legal rulings concerning marriage. The real children of such a woman are considered "Lactating Siblings" of nursed infants, who, therefore, cannot marry any of them.

Recent research has also shown another aspect of breastfeeding by the real mother. Being a source of emotional satisfaction for the child and the mother, it regulates the hormonal secretions. In addition to

the physiological effects, there are certain other important psychological effects on the child. It has been revealed from the survey of mental hospital patients that 90% of them were those who did not get suckling from their mothers during infancy. The children who had suckled from their mother for at least 9 months had a higher IQ than those who did not suckle at all or suckled for 2 months only.

There is one beautiful example of a healthy father-child relationship in the life of the Prophet (P.B.U.H), who used to stand up for his daughter Fatima (R.A), kiss her, and offer his seat whenever she came to visit him. This gesture of love, affection, and care by the Prophet (P.B.U.H) to his daughter was given in an age when people preferred sons and looked down on having a daughter. With this simple act, the Prophet (P.B.U.H) showed the Ummah to express love and affection to children and particularly daughters. A similar example may also be seen in the role model of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) when both the sons of Hadhrat Fatima (R.A) used to sit on his back while praying, the Prophet (P.B.U.H) used to prolong his prayers for them.

The Prophet (P.B.U.H) used to make arrangements for the horse and camel riding, swimming, and tent pegging of children. Hadhrat Ali (RA) had been made in charge of such training of children. Prophet (P.B.U.H) personally had been taking an interest in the exercise of children. He (P.B.U.H) used to keep children standing in a line and then asked them to touch him. The children came to him fast and may fall on his chest. Prophet (P.B.U.H) used to kiss them and give some prizes for encouragement. The Prophet (P.B.U.H) had been preparing the future generation and giving practical examples that a Muslim father should not be unmindful of his children, who are the future hope of the *Ummah* – probably, this may be the reason we do not find even a single example of any rebellious child in the early period of Islamic history. Keeping children clean and tidy is also the most important duty of a mother. The daughters of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) used to send their children to him after bathing them, dressing them in clean clothes, and perfuming them.

Moral Training:

Parents and elders nowadays are skeptical and accusatory of the rebellious behavior of children in general. In light of the above practices, which the Prophet (P.B.U.H) had been doing for the proper upbringing and character building of children, may we ask the present-day parents and elders how much time and care they are giving to their children? And, in the event that the children are not getting proper care and love from their parents, if they become rebellious, there should be no surprise about some negative behavior of the children. Let us see how the Prophet (P.B.U.H) has given us guidance for the moral training of our children.

- After attaining the age of 10 years, boys and girls should be asked to sleep on separate beds from their father and mother. Some recent research has proved the bad effects of sleeping with the young ones of either sex with their parents.

- It has already been pointed out that when a child sees his father reading the Quran or some other books, he loves to follow him, and if he/she is welcomed, will do the same in the future. This may become a habit when they become adult. This is also the proper time to engage children in home chores. If the father is interested in gardening, the child may also be encouraged to follow him. They may be asked to plant the seeds of flowers and vegetables, and after a few days, they may be shown the saplings coming out of the earth. This could not only be a fascinating event for them, but it may also provide an opportunity for them to understand the process of reproduction when explained by the father.

- To encourage the children, they should be appreciated by giving them gifts for each of their successes in studies, games, or making speeches in school. In this way, they would work hard to achieve excellence in the future.

- At the age of 12-15 years, the children are prone to pressure. At this stage, they are not emotionally set, but being clean and simple-hearted, they may become prey to good or bad friends. This may be dealt with very cautiously.

Findings:

The findings of this study highlight the profound impact of educational policies on children's moral and social development in Pakistan. Khan and Javed (2020) also highlight a correlation between policies and social issues. They found that the removal of structured ethical teachings from public education post-1970 led to increased individualism and reduced communal responsibility among students. This study concludes that the shift in curricula post-1970, particularly the removal of morning assemblies and nationalistic poetry or simply ethical education, led to a decline in collective moral values and social fragmentation.

According to Aslam and Zafar (2021), students from lower-income backgrounds have significantly lower access to ethical and moral education due to disparities in the schooling systems. Therefore, this study suggests that a disparity in educational systems, i.e., between elite private schools, government institutions, and madrassas, exacerbates inequality. As a result, the younger generation has become increasingly detached from ethical values that were once embedded in the educational framework through morning assemblies, national poetry, and character-building exercises.

This shift has not only affected individual behavior but has also influenced broader societal trends, including the rise in violence, intolerance, and social polarization. Therefore, there is a need to reintegrate moral and ethical education into the national curriculum, ensuring a balanced approach that respects both religious and secular perspectives. Furthermore, policymakers must recognize the importance of a standardized education system that fosters national unity rather than division. By

bridging the ideological and economic gaps in education, Pakistan can cultivate a generation that is not only academically proficient but also morally conscious and socially responsible.

Conclusion:

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping the moral, social, and intellectual development of children. In the context of Pakistan, the evolution of the education system has had a direct impact on children's rights, particularly with access to quality education and ethical upbringing. Over time, shifts in educational policies have led to a departure from faith-based and values-driven education, creating a fragmented system that no longer prioritizes moral development. The challenges faced by children today, including violence, deprivation, and socio-economic disparities, are closely linked to the weakening of ethical foundations in education. Without a strong moral compass embedded in schooling, children are left vulnerable to external influences that may hinder their holistic growth and societal contributions.

To ensure a more balanced and impactful education system, it is imperative to revisit the foundational goals of learning and character development. Integrating ethical education alongside modern academic disciplines can foster a sense of responsibility, empathy, and community engagement in students. A comprehensive educational reform must emphasize both intellectual and moral development, ensuring that future generations grow up with a well-rounded perspective that enables them to contribute positively to society. By recognizing education as a powerful tool for social transformation, Pakistan can work towards an inclusive and value-driven system that upholds children's rights and prepares them for a future built on integrity, knowledge, and compassion.

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