Why education matters – school ‘choice’ and differing views on citizenship in Pakistan

Marie Lall

To appear in CITIZENSHIP STUDIES, Feb 2012

The article discusses young Pakistanis’ self articulation of their relationship with the state, focusing in particular on the perceptions held by those aged between 15 and 25 and who are in education.

The research used a mixed methods approach. Data was collected in 6 private, 11 philanthropic, and 3 government schools as well as 2 madrassas and 5 universities in urban, semi urban and rural areas in Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. A questionnaire with qualitative and quantitative sections was distributed to class 10 students and over 1000 were returned.

The research found, on aggregate response, that there is a high sense of belonging to the nation, yet paradoxically also a high sense of alienation with regard to the state. Whilst most of those surveyed professed awareness of their rights and duties, the youth was seen by the same respondents as mostly ignorant of these. The factor that caused the greatest variation was the type of school attended where responses and attitudes regarding the state, rights, responsibilities and citizenship differed markedly. This paper discusses how this school ‘choice’ is linked with particular perceptions of citizenship by looking beyond class and problematising the relationship between education and the perceptions of the state.

---

1 I would like to thank Dave Gillborn, Asad Hashim, Christopher Langton, Irfan Muzaffar, Abbas Rachid, Boris Vormann and Christian Wagner for comments on the various drafts of this article. Thanks also go to Dr Ali Khan and the department of Social Science at LUMS for hosting me for a semester during my study leave which allowed me to collect the data for this article. Special thanks go to Maryam Mohiuddin Ahmed and Viren Lall who helped with the collation and analysis of the dataset.