

Interviewee: Khalil Rana

Male, Age: 40

Birthplace: Gulmit, Pakistan

Occupation: Health Practitioner

1. What do you feel are three important things U.S. students should know about Pakistan?

K.R.: First of all the U.S. students should know that all Pakistanis are not religious fundamentalists, extremists, or terrorists. These are only a very few people (although they are strong). The majority of the population is peace loving and moderate. Secondly the U.S. students should get knowledge that Pakistan although it is a very small country (only equal to California) it has diversity in culture, geography, and natural beauty. Also, U.S. students need an in-depth study of Pakistan's socio-political situation and current issues in the local context, not just believe what they were told by their own strong media.

2. What do you feel are two critical issues or challenges facing the nation of Pakistan today?

K.R.: The first challenge the country is facing is religious extremism, sectarian tension and terrorism. These all have roots in the Afghan war and emerged after the Soviet pull-out from Afghanistan. The second challenge is poverty and illiteracy; both are major factors for social backwardness, a lack of true democracy, good governance and quality institutions.

3. How do you feel that education in Pakistan is similar to and different from education in the U.S.? Could you give one example?

K.R.: The education system in Pakistan is entirely different from the U.S. education system. Teachers and professors in the U.S. encourage students to speak out, express their ideas freely, and disagree with teachers. Furthermore, the most modern technology and updated information are provided and available to students in the U.S. In Pakistan education in the public sector is the worst, because teachers and professors are not trained in the modern techniques of teaching; they don't have up-dated information. In Pakistan there is only the one-way lecture system, no proper class room discussions, and student questions are discouraged because the student asking a question is considered a student with poor knowledge. The content and curriculum do not match with requirements of our modern age. History books only give one perspective and are biased. Most of the public education institutions, particularly secondary schools and colleges, use Urdu as the language of instruction. This limits a student's future employment opportunity. There is also a unique system of examination in Pakistan. A

student is supposed to read a huge book, which students often don't have and then she or he has to appear for a final exam. Some students who have never even attended class also appear at the examination as private candidates. Because this is permitted, cheating is a common phenomenon in the examinations. Education is used just to get a degree or certificate, not as a means to promote personal growth or development. On the other hand there are very expensive private educational institutions in Pakistan that provide the most modern techniques, instruct courses in English, and are based on the pattern of education in the West. However these institutions are only for the rich people and poor people do not have access to these institutions.

4. How is daily life in Pakistan similar to and different from daily life in the U.S.? Could you give one example?

K.R.: Misery, poverty, sectarian tension, corruption, and tribalism are part of daily life in Pakistan. Many people don't have basic amenities or necessities of life, such as electricity, clean drinking water, proper health care, and access to education. Life is very stressful for many Pakistanis. It is only in the major cities where middle income people can have access to some forms of entertainment. The rich people in the country are very well off and enjoy life; I think even more so than the rich people of the U.S.A.

5. What are some typical expectations for men and for women in Pakistani society and culture or what are standard gender norms? Could you give one example?

K.R.: Pakistan has a male dominated society. Men are considered the sole head of a family. The birth of a male child in a family is celebrated, while the birth of a female child is not as joyous. The traditional roles of Pakistani women include domestic work such as cooking, washing, cleaning, child rearing, collecting fuel wood for cooking, farming, weeding, threshing, and harvesting. Men perform tasks out-side home such as income earning jobs, working in business, or doing the heavy manual labor. Women are not supposed to talk back or make any arguments with men. A husband or other male members of the family may consider it their right to beat a woman if she does not follow the expected guidelines of female behavior. Men are not supposed to perform any work assigned to women, to do so is socially unacceptable and taboo.

6. Some Americans say that "classic" or typical American elements are apple pie, automobiles, and Baseball. What do you feel are some things that form the core of Pakistani identity?

K.R.: In food: chicken karahi, biryani (a rice dish), tandoori bread, and mangoes are special features of Pakistan. The national dress is called Shilwar and Kameez. In games, we have field hockey, cricket and polo. In

business or exports we produce rice and cotton.

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about Pakistan?

K.R.: Yes, the madrassahs. Pakistan has about 12,000 religious schools commonly known as "madrassahs". These religious schools trace their traditions back through nearly a thousand years of Islamic teaching. Over the last few decades, however, these schools have increasingly played a role contrary to their original intent. Founded as centers of learning for the next generation of Islamic scholars and clerics, the schools now increasingly dominate the education sphere, largely because the Pakistani public school system is so underdeveloped.

The primary worry with the explosion of the madrassah system is not with the schools in general, but the impact of the radical minority of them. *Around 10-15 percent* of the schools are affiliated with extremist religious/political groups, who have co-opted education for their own ends. These specific madrassah schools teach a distorted view of Islam. Hatred is permissible, jihad gets misinterpreted to allow the murder of innocent civilians, including other Muslim men, women, and children, and the new heroes in these specific schools are terrorists. Martyrdom through suicide attacks is also extolled. Many of the radical religious schools also include weapons and physical training in their regimen, as well as weekly lessons on political speechmaking (where anti-American rhetoric is memorized). The students in these radical schools are uneducated, young, dependent on the schools, and cut off from contact with their parents for years at a time, and thus highly susceptible to being programmed towards violence.