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Marodsilton Muborakshoeva. Islam and Higher Education: Concepts, Challenges and Opportunities. London and New York: Routledge, 2012.

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Interest is growing on the topic of education in developing countries and specifically education in Muslim countries, particularly with respect to how Muslims define education. This book aims to provide insight into higher education in a Muslim context based on examples from Pakistan. It offers a chapter by chapter discussion of higher learning in a Muslim context, taking examples mainly from Pakistani universities but also from other educational settings. By analyzing both domestic and international educational settings in the face of the growing focus on international education, along with international demands, the book examines not only what factors affect higher education in Pakistan but also how universities and Islam engage each other and how, through dialogue, they can form fruitful partnerships in higher learning.

The book provides a comprehensive overview of modern universities in Pakistan and offers a selection of suggestions from a range of perspectives that could improve the quality and quantity of institutions of higher learning in Pakistan. The work discusses how factors such as religion, economic development, and financial resources affect institutions of higher learning. The work has been specifically designed to contrast the processes and outcomes of higher learning in a western context with those of Islamic institutions, particularly in Pakistan, focusing on Islamic understandings of education and university. The work also evaluates the influence of politics, economics, and identity on higher learning, in combination with historic and cultural factors. This handbook responds to recent developments and debates in order to foster an awareness that is both beneficial and illuminating to the higher education community and offers an alternative case study as a resource for information on higher learning in developing nations, an Islamic context, or a south Asian geographical space. The work could also be beneficial to students and researchers as both a primary and a secondary resource.

Part of the book's qualitative exploration of higher education includes an examination of the concepts of higher education in Muslim contexts, including the different definitions of concepts such as "university" and the way those concepts continue to shape education and practice in Muslim contexts. This analysis offers new insights into theoretical debates about universities in Muslim countries. In addition to discussing practical challenges that need to be overcome in Pakistan, the author argues that there is a need for institutions to constantly review their mission, aims, and objectives in light of the wider economic, political, and socio-cultural and religious development of a society. The book is thematically organized, and the chapters flow in a logical order.

The book is composed of six chapters, each of which has been selected to present various aspects of the contemporary context, and each section in turn contributes to an overview of relevant sub-topics or issues. Each chapter describes and gives an account of the history, culture, politics, society, and economies involved in university administration and development, particularly in Pakistan. The work's six chapters include: Higher learning in Muslim contexts: the past and present; Modern developments of higher education in Muslim contexts; Ideas of a university: key conceptual issues and challenges; Concepts of a university in Pakistan; Case studies of universities visited; and Challenges faced by universities in Pakistan. These chapters review the history of higher education institutions and assess opportunities for some Pakistani universities to become centers of excellence in the future subject to adequate support from the government, industries, philanthropists, and society at large. In return, these universities would have to cater to the needs of the society, from providing basic needs in the areas of health and education to spearheading projects and discovery in science and technology.

In the first chapter, an overview of higher learning in Muslim contexts is provided by exploring Quranic imperatives to self-improvement and education, followed by the history of education in a Muslim setting up to the present day. This section examines the historical aspects of contemporary university education and explores the influences upon higher education, including that of creative license among scholars in the educational institutions and the importance of philosophy and the natural sciences, making it easier to situate developments appearing later in the work. In the second chapter, a number of factors that affect higher education in Muslim contexts, for example how an even greater focus on the natural sciences, marginalised the madrasahs and placed them in a defensive position these influences are presented through the discussion of examples from different countries. The author discusses and evaluates the aspects explored in this section while regarding Islam as an overarching frame that binds all these cases and therefore determines the values and importance of these aspects.

The third chapter of the text presents a conceptual exploration of university education in international literature. This section aims to introduce the reader to the conceptualizations of university education that have shaped the contemporary definition of what a university ought to be. What follows is an explanation of the historical and cultural developments defining a university, thus allowing the reader to critically assess the issues that play into the political dimension of university education, particularly the effects of western university education models on non-western contexts. For example how the imbalanced focus on natural sciences in the Developed world (where the humanities are marginalised subjects) has been implemented in other regions of the world. This chapter discusses potential solutions to restoring the balance and a new role for the university as a producer of culture in the developing world. The fourth chapter discusses the definition and development of the concept “university” within a Pakistani context in particular. The content of these four chapters cover higher learning in a Muslim context, modern developments that have affected higher education, and the concepts of university, as discussed in scholarly literature; these chapters also analyze the Pakistani concept of university education. As such, this section provides a clear and concise explanation of the issues that are at play in this domain and sets the scene for the discussion of the case studies that are to follow.

The fifth chapter of the book presents the fieldwork conducted in universities around Pakistan. This section is aims to introduce the reader to concrete examples of university education in a Muslim context; these examples are then compared and contrasted to the concepts of what a university is and ought to be. What follows is an explanation of the Pakistani university experience, which is typically affected by the aims and objectives of the university, thus allowing the reader to engage the issues that play within Pakistani university education. The sixth chapter discusses the challenges faced within institutions of higher education in a Pakistani context, such as academic freedom, research culture, funding and local customs or cultures that could pose issues and dilemmas when trying to create a ‘modern’ institution in a traditional setting (issues of gender, knowledge production etc.). This discussion links back to the earlier chapters devoted to higher learning in a Muslim context, modern developments that affect higher education, and the concepts of a university that are discussed in scholarly literature. This final chapter also analyzes the Pakistani concept of university education, with a focus on how it is actually put into practice. Specifically, it offers solutions to issues of academic freedom, responsibilities for the university and the state, and reconciling tradition and modernity. This section provides an analysis of the issues that are at play in Pakistan, in particular, and offers up suggestions for improving higher learning in Pakistan and other Muslim settings.

Presenting diverse and often competing views on all aspects of higher learning, this handbook will be a good reference tool for students and scholars of political science, Islamic

studies, South Asian studies, comparative education, and culture and society. The volume gives insight into an ongoing process that is often regarded as “complete” in Europe and in the United States of America and provides a model for (developing) Muslim nations elsewhere to adopt and follow. Overall, the book offers the reader a good resource that serves as a reference for scholars interested in education and the politics of education. Its chapter separation works well to offer the reader a simple guide to follow, with information relatively easy to find. The book will serve students from different backgrounds as well as help researchers with case studies on Pakistan, education and Islamic studies.

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