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Muborakshoeva, M. Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series: Islam and Higher Education. New York: Routledge Press, 2009.

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Part of the Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series, *Islam and Higher Education: Concepts, Challenges and Opportunities* consists of an introduction followed by six sections: “Higher learning in Muslim Contexts: the Past and Present” (Chapter 1); “Modern Developments of Higher Education in Muslim Contexts” (Chapter 2); “Ideas of ‘a University’: Key Conceptual Issues and Challenges” (Chapter 3); “Concepts of ‘a University’ in Pakistan” (Chapter 4); “Case Studies of Universities Visited” (Chapter 5); and “Challenges Faced by Universities in Pakistan” (Chapter 6), followed by a conclusion. This book sets out to explore higher education in the Muslim context, focusing particular attention on practices in Pakistan. Through the use of seven case studies conducted within Pakistani institutions of higher education, the author argues there is incongruence, both historically and presently, among Muslim institutions of higher education in terms of their missions and objectives relative to the populations they serve. Throughout each chapter, the lack of resources for teaching, researching, and publishing in Muslim nations is reviewed. Pressing further, the author contends that globally, limited work has been done to examine and compare the practices and objectives of Muslim institutions of higher education not only to each other but also to non-Muslim institutions, particularly European institutions—thus identifying a gap in the Muslim higher education literature. Finally, the author raises the point that some Pakistani madrasahs—educational institutions—have been accused of supporting or even initiating terrorist activities; as such, the author seeks to disqualify such madrasahs from inclusion in any comparison of traditional institutions of higher education. Field-based qualitative research, historiographies, and interviews were conducted to contextualize the author’s argument.

In the introduction, “Criticisms of Higher Education: The Literature Gap and the Research Problem,” the author, Marodsilton Muborakshoeva, discusses the challenges associated with higher education governance¹ research, explaining that governance itself is interdisciplinary, with the term “governance” carrying significantly different meanings and modes of evaluation depending upon the context in which it is being examined. As a result, much of this section outlines previous research on the concept of governance, with a focus on the relationship between the agent(s) and the structure and structures of various steering components. The first chapter, “Islam and Higher Education: Higher learning in Muslim Contexts,” provides a historical journey into Muslim educational traditions and intellectual milieu. Historically, the teaching of Muslim philosophies and traditions has been prioritized over the teaching of philosophical and natural sciences at madrasahs located in India. The author discusses how the teaching of philosophy and logic has shifted in priority throughout recent centuries and how demographic, economic, and religious factors have driven shifts in prioritization.

The second chapter, “Islam and Higher Education: Modern Developments of Higher Education in Muslim Contexts,” presents some obstacles Muslim universities face in terms of education development. Modern Muslim universities have shifted from carrying a religious focus to emphasizing the natural sciences. Since the Muslim educational approach has been inconsistent over the past centuries, however, there is confusion as to what constitutes appropriate educational design. Throughout Europe, several countries have had to revise their educational systems and develop different models of university instruction in order to better

reflect the objectives and missions² of modern day institutions. Some Muslim universities have chosen to adopt various European practices.

In the third chapter, “Islam and Higher Education: Ideas of ‘a university,’” the author builds upon the historical development of Islamic institutions and presents an analysis of the modern Islamic institution. Several models of traditional Muslim institutions such as madrasahs, congregational mosques, zawiyas (Sufi lodges), and others—have historically been characterized as “universities” despite teaching primarily traditional and religious content (and not as a component as a broader curriculum). This has resulted in considerable variation among institutions in terms of not only structural organization but also of instructional content and focus. Because of this, the author argues, there exists significant variation among Islamic institutions world-wide in the prioritization of instructional content. As a result, a student’s choice of what university to attend (particularly if made without consideration for university *type*) can largely, unforeseeably, perhaps, to the prospective student, impact the types of jobs the student will be eligible to pursue upon graduation; for example, religious schools yield religious scholars, and non-scientifically oriented institutions yield non-scientists.

In contrast, while modern European universities offer opportunities to focus in various subject areas, the foundational understanding of what constitutes an institution of higher education is more uniform. European universities have evolved with respect to subject matter taught—with prospective students typically being aware of the type of institution to which they wish to apply, yet institutional structures are more standard. The author argues that European countries try to provide students with educational opportunities in the areas of technology, IT, business management, and research and development for sciences and technology. Unlike their Muslim counterparts, modern European universities have also the tools to meet their funding, governance, and instructional objectives and can provide instruction in the relevant subject areas to prepare students to pursue careers in those areas. Muslim universities, in contrast, are currently lacking the tools and the means to provide instruction in industrialized and technological studies. Although it is important for Muslim universities to stay true to their original concepts (namely as institutions meant to convey traditional religious and philosophical messages), the author believes, these institutions must also be willing to expand their offerings, seek funding for the instruction of broader subject areas, and set aside societal pressures to in order improve students’ opportunity to obtain educations in fields other than those that fall within traditional instructional areas.

The fourth chapter, “Islam and Higher Education: Concepts of ‘a University’ in Pakistan” explains how the public higher education sector in Pakistan has faced challenges since the time of British occupation. The higher education system has seen significant influence not only from colonial and post-colonial Britain and the United States but also from changes in the local traditional environment. While this chapter explains that a university should embody unrestricted pursuit of knowledge, produce educated students, and contribute to the formation of human capital, the confluence of influences and pressures exerted on local institutions has overcomplicated the purposes of a university; furthermore, it should be noted that even institutions with unified objectives will not be able to meet those objectives until an established strategy for meeting them has been identified.

Chapter five, “Islam and Higher Education: Case Studies of Universities Visited” highlights the diversity of higher education institutions in Pakistan and India. These institutions differ with respect not only to their missions, visions, and teaching methods but also to the degree to which societal pressures influence the institutions. The connection between

modernizing Muslim universities and traditional Muslim universities is still being processed. As has been the case throughout Islamic history, institutions are seeking to maintain an excellence in education. However, the “new age” of the Muslim university focuses on not only teaching but on how to properly conduct research. Additionally, the more recently built universities examined in this chapter have gone beyond profit making missions and have begun offering subjects of national interest, e.g., health sciences, education, arts, business, and others. While these institutions are offering a wider array of subjects, there is typically not a large enough enrollment to spread these programs nation-wide, which has created significant gaps in the educational obtainment opportunities across the nation.³

“Islam and Higher Education: Challenges Faced by Universities in Pakistan,” chapter six, reiterates specific challenges Muslim universities in Pakistan face, including limited research culture, lack of human resources, funding, and conflict between traditional and modernizing approaches to education delivery. Some issues lie within the schools themselves, such as limited subject offerings, linguistic challenges, or inconsistent attendance requirements. Additionally, the topic of the position of women in higher education is discussed. Women have the opportunity to attend universities, yet cultural expectations provide informal barriers.

Islam and Higher Education provides a broad investigation of what changes should be made by Muslim universities, particularly in Pakistan in order to meet the needs of its students. The text examines the different historical traditions of higher learning, compares different types of institutions—Muslim and non-Muslim—and evaluates universities’ teaching and research methods. Across all Muslim institutions, tradition has been the main attribute universities wanted to keep. However, conceptions of what a university is and what universities should evolve into are not necessarily the same, leading to an incongruence in the missions and objectives of institutions relative to the student populations they seek to serve. Furthermore, this incongruence ultimately creates a gap between Muslim and non-Muslim universities not only in Pakistan - but worldwide. Documenting the transition of traditional universities to more modern institutions could be beneficial for other universities considering modernizing.

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¹ “Governance” in higher education refers to the ways in which institutions of higher education are structurally organized and managed.

² For example, economic drivers, political changes, social pressures, religious orientation, accreditations, and other factors.

³ Related to the issue of insufficient enrollment in particular subject areas is the broader dilemma of the lack of sufficient numbers of prospective applicants regionally to found new (modern) universities. In order to found a university, there must be a sufficient demand from students looking to further their education. If the demand for a traditional university education is not sufficient, there is little hope of establishing a new university since it will not have the students to create the demand. Because of this challenge, it is also difficult to raise sufficient capital to fund modern (non-traditional) universities in Muslim contexts.