

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

Critical Thinking for the Modern Muslim Woman Psychology Student: A Summer in Islamabad

by Justin Podur



A teacher's Point of View

"Sir, should we apply critical thinking to all areas of our lives, including our faith?" The young woman in full niqab asks me this question as we sit around a small table: a couple of professors from the women's campus of the International Islamic University - Islamabad (IIU-I), a number of women students who are considering taking two short summer courses with foreign professors, our host, Junaid Ahmad, now a professor at Lehigh University of Management Services (LUMS), me, and the other visiting professor, Robert Jensen from University of Texas - Austin's Journalism School.

It's 2008, and while I was expecting this type of question to come up at some point, given that I was asked to teach a course on Critical Thinking at the Islamic University, in Islamabad, in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, I wasn't expecting it to be the very first question at a preliminary meeting before my course even met.

"In the course," I start carefully, "I'll talk about critical thinking in different domains. Critical thinking is something you can do—pay attention to evidence, make and follow logical arguments. Your faith is a value, in many cases a fundamental value, so there need not be any contradiction."

"Sir, should we apply critical thinking to all areas of our lives, including our faith?"

This, as it happens, is not my personal view. I believe that religion is based on unsupportable claims, and that accepting some irrational and supernatural beliefs, even benign ones, makes it more difficult to use the tools of critical thinking to question claims which might be oppressive or harmful. But teaching at IIU-I was an opportunity to sharpen both a skill and a distinction that all committed teachers must learn. The skill is knowing where your students are and figuring out how fast and how far you can push them in the time you're given. Push too fast or too far, and you'll turn them off. Push too slowly and you've wasted opportunity. The distinction is between teaching, which is potentially transformative, and pushing one's personal views on students, which is an abuse of power and ultimately counterproductive.

As a pair of thoroughly secular foreign guest professors, Bob Jensen and I found the distinction emerge over and over again. It emerged most dramatically not in anything we taught, but in the very environment we were teaching in. IIU-I has two architecturally identical campuses: a men's campus and a women's campus. As visitors, we were allowed to teach our classes once, instead of twice, and have both men and women students in our classes (that strange thing called "co-education"). Still, the problem of gender never disappeared as became evident during one of the frequent power cuts (called "load shedding" in Pakistan) that occurred in Islamabad. In an

article he wrote at the time¹, Bob described what happened:

When we arrived that morning and found our classroom dark, we looked for a space with natural light that could accommodate the entire class. The most easily accessible place was the carpeted prayer area off the building lobby, and one of the female faculty members helping me with the class led us there. I sat down with the women, and one of the most inquisitive students raised a critical question about one of my assertions from our previous class. We launched into a lively discussion for several minutes, until we were informed that the male students had a problem with the class meeting there. I looked around and, sure enough, the men had yet to join us. They were standing off to the side, refusing to come into the prayer space, which they thought should not be used for a classroom with men and women.

Our host Junaid Ahmad, who puts his considerable organizing skills to good use in the United States and Pakistan, was starting to sort out the issue when the power came back on, and we all headed back to our regular classroom. I put my scheduled lecture on hold to allow for discussion about what had just happened. Could a prayer space be used for other purposes such as a class? And given that the space is used exclusively by men here, is it appropriate to use it for a coeducational classroom?

A debate ensued, in which the women overwhelmingly believed that the space could be repurposed for a coeducational classroom, and the men did not. To Bob, the debate was revealing about patriarchy:

What struck me about the exchange was how ill-prepared the men were to defend their position in the face of a challenge from the women. It was clear that the men were not used to facing such challenges, and as they scrambled to formulate rebuttals they did little more than restate claims with which they were comfortable and familiar. That strategy (or lack of a strategy) is hardly unique to Pakistani men.

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My class was scheduled after Bob's, but the incident was still ongoing when I arrived that day. Bob and some of the local faculty filled me in, but since my students were also not involved directly they said nothing to me about it that day.

Inspired by this incident, I added to my critical thinking reading list a piece by Chinese revolutionary Lu Xun on women's rights, a talk given in 1923 ("What Happens After Nora Leaves Home?"). In the essay, Lu Xun, who was a very independent-minded intellectual in the period of ferment before the Chinese Revolution, looks at Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*. At the end of the play, which premiered in Norway in 1879, the protagonist, Nora, leaves her stifling marriage in order to discover herself. Several decades later, for an audience of Chinese women, Lu Xun's lecture argued that for women to be truly free, they had to have the material means to support themselves—that freedom was an economic proposition, not solely a philosophical one. In its assumption of female equality, its embeddedness in Asian cultural norms, and its practical discussion of how to achieve freedom, I thought the essay was an excellent choice for my class, and one that would not have occurred to me to assign had the incident in Bob's class not happened.

I asked my students to guess who wrote the essay. Most guessed a Western woman, writing in the 1960s, which gave me the opportunity to show that feminism had roots that were deeper and more local to Asia than they had been led to believe.

ost of what I taught in Critical Thinking had to do with trying to determine what the claims were in a piece of writing, what the logic of the arguments were, and what the evidence for the assertions was: the same kinds of skills that are taught at universities everywhere. The situation's unique challenges—trying to navigate political and religious taboos that were also the topics of greatest interest to the students—were a product of the unique opportunity we were given, through the IIU-I's Iqbal Institute fellowship: Bob and I stayed at the guest house, worked most of the time on our own projects, and taught one course each at the IIU-I.

Though my class was called Critical Thinking, in retrospect it might have been called Critical Thinking for the Modern Muslim Woman Psychology Student. For some reason, even though the university had students in Islamic Studies, Economics, Political Science, International Relations, Environmental Science, Bioinformatics, and Media, the vast majority of my 40-some students were psychology students from the women's campus. I had only a smattering of male students from other disciplines (mostly economics and politics). Bob, who taught a course on Media Law and Ethics, had a slightly

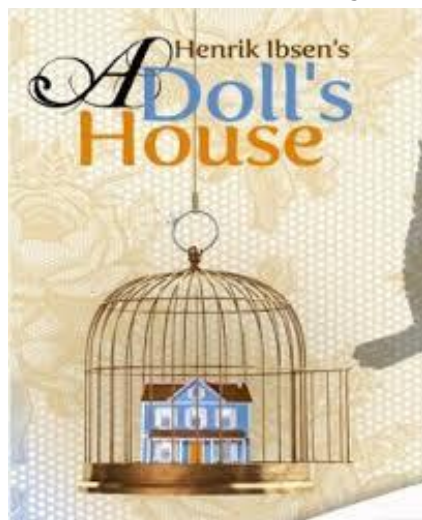


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bigger group of about 60, all from the Media and Communications program. Males and females were together in our classes, which was not normal practice and led to the incident described above. Most of the women in my class wore the hijab, many wore the niqab, and a plurality just wore the traditional shalwar kameez. A couple of the men wore western clothes, most wore the shalwar kameez, and a few alternated on alternating days. I saw in the coexistence of different norms of dress the same fluidity between religious, traditional, and western norms and practices that exists throughout South Asia. What we were able to accomplish depended on this diversity, which has been diminishing with the increasing strength of politicized religious doctrines in Pakistan, demonstrated by the incident in Bob's class.

In a later class, Bob held a longer discussion about the space-sharing incident, which was attended by other faculty members who stood up for the principle of co-education, as well as by students involved in the campus branch of one of the religious political parties. These student politicians wanted co-education to cease and for us to conduct separate classes for male and female students, but they were ultimately overruled and our classes continued on a co-ed basis.

Of course, the conflict between religious rulings and universal human rights—or even just between universal education and gender segregation—is not unique to Pakistan. This past school year, we had a case arise at my own Canadian campus, York University, where a sociology student in an online course sought accommodation from his professor because his religious beliefs did not allow him to attend meetings with female students. The professor refused to accommodate the student, the administration argued that the human rights code demanded that the student be accommodated, and a debate arose about whether granting this accommodation would have been oppressive. The student ended up doing the group project².



But even though these debates do come up everywhere, they have a particular force and salience in Muslim countries and especially in Pakistan. Civilian democracy and military dictatorship, class and gender, ethnicity and caste, imperialism and local tyranny, and of course religion and politics, are all in play in Pakistan. For anyone thinking about these questions, Pakistan is an important place to study. For a secular radical teacher trying to teach in a religious context, Pakistan offered some interesting challenges,

including how to design a course that students would be receptive to, how to find common ground between a secular radical world view and a religious and nationalist one, and how to challenge views a teacher like me might disagree with while communicating respect to one's students.

Designing the Course

I designed the course to appeal to students from all disciplines. The proposal I sent to the IIU-I in May 2008 included the following:

To think critically is to be aware and explicit about one's assumptions and premises, to not accept claims without evidence, and to be prepared to revise or change one's conclusions when presented with new evidence. Everyone thinks critically at some times and uncritically at others. This course aims to give students a chance to think critically in their own fields of inquiry and in others.

Like most teachers, I was far too ambitious in terms of what I expected to accomplish in the class. I had planned on giving students four assignments, plus oral presentations, except that because they had difficulty with the workload and less experience writing in English than I had planned for, I had to settle for only two written assignments. The first was to identify the premises and conclusions in a series of short arguments, to state whether the argument was deductively valid, inductively strong, or worthless, and to state whether the student believed the premises to be true, rejected them as false, or had no opinion. The simplest example was a public health question from a standard logic textbook: "The bird flu vaccine was tested on 10,000 people. None of them got bird flu. I should get vaccinated since I don't want to catch the flu." The second assignment was to summarize the argument made by Lu Xun in his article on women's rights, to describe the writer's perspective, to state the student's agreements and disagreements with the writer, and as a bonus, to guess the writer's gender, country, and the decade the article was written.

In my lectures, I emphasized applications, trying to explore with students the idea of rationality. After an introduction to concepts in logic (syllogism, premises, conclusions, analogies, consistency) and statistics (central tendency, variability, probability), I moved on to discuss the use of "critical thinking" and "rationality" in various fields, some of which define rationality differently than others. This included lectures on economic, psychological, political, and scientific rationality. Once I had made a case for rationality, I added additional complexity, discussing questions like: Where do values and ideologies fit with rationality? Can rationality serve them, or does critical thinking conflict with them? What does it mean to think critically about science itself and about rationality? Why does rationality in one field (for example, economic rationality in maximizing profits or military rationality in winning victories) create irrational behavior in another field

(for example, by destroying the environment or killing people)?

Students joined the discussions and came to attach a high value on rationality. They started to qualify their statements in discussions with why they were being rational or using critical thinking. I had more difficulty trying to lead discussions about the dangers of narrowly conceived economic or military rationality. While students were interested in environmental problems and discussed local examples, they didn't follow my argument that many environmental problems were the outcome of a narrowly conceived market rationality. Instead, they insisted that corruption or a lack of education were to blame. Similarly, my subtle attempts to argue for the rationality of internationalism were mostly lost on them, as students saw rationality in the service of their country as an unqualified good.

In these discussions, students were willing to accompany me to the point of valuing rationality and critical thinking, but most of them stopped the journey short of the point I wanted to get to, which was to use rationality to question ideology and come to a more radical analysis of the world's problems. I did not feel, however, that pushing harder would have led to a better outcome, though more time and more assignments may have created more openings for such efforts.



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Identity and the Teacher-student Relationship

I was keen to take the opportunity to teach in Pakistan because this country has been particularly fascinating to me for a long time. My parents, Christian Malayalis, came to Canada from Kerala, South India—a part of the subcontinent that was not divided by the partition or by the India-Pakistan wars. From cultural, linguistic, and historical perspectives, there are bigger differences between the north and south of India than there are between the north of India and Pakistan. The histories that influenced my understanding of India growing up were written by secular Indian Nationalists from the north of the subcontinent, who were writing before the partition: Ambedkar, as well as Gandhi and Nehru. Visiting only the northern part of India would have shown me only half of the story of the struggle

for independence. Teaching in Pakistan was exciting; it was my chance to see a part of the subcontinent where it would have otherwise been difficult to travel.

My list of topics, "gender, politics, nationalism", did not include "religion." This was partly because of taboos like Pakistan's anti-blasphemy law, partly because as a foreign non-Muslim I was not in an ideal position to challenge religion, and partly because my prior readings gave me the sense that "Islam" was the facile explanation for analysts, especially of Pakistan.

I particularly wanted to get to know the world of one of the scholar-activists I admired the most, Eqbal Ahmad³, who was of Pakistani origin. Some other activists whom I knew and respected were also Pakistani: media activist and *Viewpoint Online* editor Farooq Sulehria, organizer and professor Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, professors and anti-nuclear activists Pervez Hoodbhoy and Zia Mian, scholar of Pakistan's cultural politics and activist Saadia Toor, and our host, Junaid. Virtually all of these activists are also teachers whose writings had led me to want to do my own investigations of Pakistan's political economy and social movements. Further, as a critic of Canadian and U.S. foreign policy towards the poorer countries, I knew how important Pakistan is in that key theatre of U.S. and Canadian intervention—Afghanistan. Teaching in Pakistan was an opportunity for me to understand better the ways Pakistan and Afghanistan's histories, influences, and politics interact, hoping to develop a stronger anti-imperialist politics. (This was in 2008. I have since filled out the picture somewhat: I managed to get to Kabul in 2013).

In addition to politics and my own partly Indian and partly Western background, both of which are suspect in Pakistan, I wondered: would students listen to someone from a different religious background? Given these differences, would I even have the credibility to teach? As one former leftist, now conservative Pakistani-Canadian writer put it to me in one of our last email exchanges: "Do you really believe that students who believe that you are the infidel and deserve to be converted to Islam are going to grasp the notion of critical thinking?"

I replied: "You are right about the difficulty of teaching critical thinking here, and about my lack of authority as a Christian-born Indian and a Canadian, but the teacher-student relationship still exists. . . . I try to make some modest contribution and maybe some students will think about things a little differently based on something they heard in my class or Jensen's. . . . I'm here to teach 'critical thinking'", I added, "because I believe in trying to engage people I disagree with. I wouldn't be teaching 'critical thinking' at a place I didn't think there was a need for it. Every lecture I've given here I've been

trying to get students to challenge their own preconceived beliefs and assumptions about gender, politics, nationalism."

Touching Religion Indirectly

My list of topics, "gender, politics, nationalism", did not include "religion." This was partly because of taboos like Pakistan's anti-blasphemy law, partly because as a foreign non-Muslim I was not in an ideal position to challenge religion, and partly because my prior readings gave me the sense that "Islam" was the facile explanation for analysts, especially of Pakistan. My hypothesis was that the political phenomena that seem on the surface to be driven by Islam are actually driven by the underlying phenomena studied by radical political economists: questions of economy and state, of military and business power. Yes, culture and identity are important, but even in this sphere nationalism is at least as powerful a category as religion, and religious identity is itself manipulated, mobilized, and used by political actors. The controversy over co-education that arose in Bob Jensen's class, for example, became aggravated when student politicians from one of the religious political parties got involved, though it de-escalated once Bob discussed the issue directly with his students. Their desire to continue the class as a co-ed class won the day.

The conflict between the students' keen interest in questions of gender, politics, nationalism, and religion on the one hand and the deep taboos prohibiting free discussion of these questions on the other, required some very careful balancing.

Still, despite my sense that Pakistan is best understood in terms of multiple variables, where religion is only one among several, the topic of Islam kept coming up in class, with students raising religious and political examples in their questions about critical thinking concepts: *Is faith rational? Are science and religion compatible? Can religious doctrines be interpreted critically?* Though I expected courses tackling such questions to be of great interest to students and of benefit to their intellectual culture, I also had to take into account the power of the religious parties and organizations on campus. Inevitably, such teaching will face organized resistance. Tackling the issues indirectly, as I did, may be the best compromise for the current moment.

The conflict between the students' keen interest in questions of gender, politics, nationalism, and religion on the one hand and the deep taboos prohibiting free discussion of these questions on the other, required some very careful balancing. The arguments I asked students to parse for their assignments were from the fields of public health (vaccination), environmental studies (climate change), labor economics (the inadequacy of minimum

wage), and feminism (the relationship between economic emancipation and equality for women)—all issues important to radicals. But I did not ask students to apply the tools of critical thinking to religion or nationalism, even when they showed curiosity about connections between them.

Pakistan's Education System from the Inside

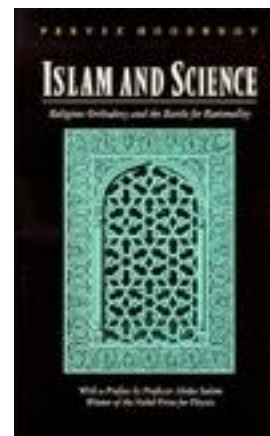
For guidance on how to balance these conflicts, I drew on some of the Pakistani scholar-activists mentioned above, whose discussions of their organizing and teaching invoke the education-for-social-change models discussed in Paolo Freire and Myles Horton's book, *We Make the Road by Walking*. Freire and Horton's traditions of radical teaching and popular education go well beyond techniques, of course, but I did find that "nontraditional" techniques of popular education were very well received in my classes at IIU-I. I used small-group discussions and "think-pair-share" to great success in my critical thinking class. In a longer course, I would have also included simulations, debates, and games. Given the students' evident appetite for the small-group exercises, I suspect that these, too, would have been very successful. In contrast, the students' struggle with the English language was clearly a limitation on how much I could do in the class. Students had such challenge just reading and writing the assignments that following the logic and analysis of arguments was particularly difficult. These were not problems specific to IIU-I, but problems that percolated throughout the education system.

A recent mainstream critique of Pakistan's education system was provided by the International Crisis Group's (ICG) Asia Report No. 257, *Education Reform in Pakistan* (June 23/14). The ICG points out that nine million children in Pakistan receive no education and literacy rates are stagnant. The report blames teacher absenteeism, curriculum weakness, and the "ghost schools" (private schools and madrassas) that have arisen to fill the void. Pakistan's expenditure on schooling is the lowest in the region. The curriculum, the ICG points out, has an "over-emphasis . . . on Islamic interpretations, not just in religion classes but also in history, literature and the sciences." Reforming education is politically contentious, played out over the curriculum as each party strives to appear more nationalist or religious than the other.

The most sustained critics of Pakistani education on the left, and of the university system in particular, are probably physicists Pervez Hoodbhoy and A.H. Nayyar. Hoodbhoy, author of *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality*, and editor of *Education and the State: Fifty Years of Pakistan*, shows how the Zia dictatorship's campaigns of 'Islamization' did tremendous damage to Pakistan's capacity to conduct research and to train scientists. A.H. Nayyar, along with Rubina Saigol and K. K. Aziz, carefully studies Pakistan's textbooks and curricula, exposing the use of the education system for an agenda of Islamization and indoctrination. The results of this religious agenda, described in reports

like *The Subtle Subversion: the State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan*⁴, are not only an educational system with a strong political and ideological bias, but also a system that suffers academic and scientific weakness.

Hoodbhoy's and Nayyar's critiques are shared by Eqbal Ahmad, who argues that the flaws in Pakistan's higher education have multiple reasons: the "confused and in some ways very uncreative attitude of nationalist governments toward language", in which governments impose linguistic orthodoxy and purity but maintain business/capitalist links to the West; the inherited colonial system of higher education which was to produce "servants of the empire"; and of course international financial institutions like the World Bank, which de-emphasize higher education, seeking to "produce a relatively more skilled pool of workers and not people who can govern themselves"(Ahmad, *Confronting Empire* pp. 19-20). Ahmad's answer was to try to create a university, Khaldunia, named after Abdul-Rehman Ibn Khaldun, a "secular and scientific figure" from the fourteenth century. Ahmad chose that name because of his "belief that the Muslim people, or for that matter any people in the world, will not make a passage from a pre-industrial traditional culture and economy to a modern culture and economy without finding a linkage within, finding forms and relationships that are congruent between modernity and inherited traditions. . . . My argument is that we will not be able to fight fundamentalism until we produce a modern progressive secular educated class of people who know the traditions and take the best of it" (pg. 22) But Pakistan was too turbulent and the 1990s too unsympathetic for Khaldunia to be established.



Instead of Khaldunia, what we have as of this year is the Eqbal Ahmed Centre for Public Education (EACPE): Hoodbhoy and others have tried to honor Eqbal Ahmad's legacy by creating EACPE (eacpe.org), which could become a kind of online Khaldunia. EACPE's mission is to "foster the use of science and reason to understand nature and society and so better enable the citizens of Pakistan to participate fully in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of their society; to exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities; to value human rights, democracy and the rule of law; to promote cultural and religious diversity; to raise awareness of global issues and the natural environment; and to advance the goals of international peace and justice." EACPE's site, just getting started, features interviews with Noam Chomsky (another friend of both Eqbal Ahmad and Pervez Hoodbhoy), a lecture series introducing Calculus, archives of articles relating to Pakistan, and more⁵.

Is There Space for Change?

The problem of education in Pakistan was brought to international attention by the Nobel Committee in fall 2014, when Malala Yusufzai, a young advocate for girls' education who was nearly killed by the Taliban for her trouble, received the Nobel Peace Prize. Even more dramatically, a massacre of Pakistani schoolchildren at an Army School in Peshawar by the Taliban on December 16, 2014, revealed how schools and students are all too often considered a military target to the Taliban, whose relationship to the Pakistani military establishment is complex and not always conflictual.

There was no way that my experience would be anything like that of a Pakistani faculty member, not least because of physical risks. The Taliban target all schools. At the university level, in September 2014 in Karachi, two scholars, Muhammad Shakil Auj and Maulana Masood Baig, were shot dead. Professor Auj had been accused of blasphemy by fellow scholars at his university and denounced at a seminary for a speech he had made in 2012.

Towards the end of my summer at IIU-I, Bob Jensen and I started giving public lectures on an area we both study and work in: the foreign policy of the West. We share a similar approach to lectures as we do to teaching: we try not to tell the audience what they want to hear, but rather to find some way to challenge them. In North America, our public lectures criticize U.S. and Canadian foreign policy. But in Pakistan, where U.S. intervention is extremely unpopular, such criticism would have been no challenge to the audience. On the other hand, the idea of detente and even alliance with Pakistan's neighbors, India and Afghanistan, did challenge popular beliefs in Pakistan, and when we suggested in our lectures that to be truly sovereign Pakistan would have to make peace with these neighbors, we felt like we were making a radical argument that challenged our audiences.

Ultimately, is there enough space for the left to talk about Pakistan this way, we wondered? In an article about Pakistan's left⁶ Hoodbhoy argues that there is space for struggle, but only if the left is very strategic. In particular, Hoodbhoy suggests that the Pakistani left over-emphasizes the critique of imperialism: "It is futile to frame the debate in pro- or anti-America terms; the key point is to be pro-people." Given the impossibility of the left gaining state power in the foreseeable future, he argues, the role of the left would be in "setting the moral compass" and fighting for "economic justice, secularism, universalistic ideas of human rights, good governance, women's rights, and rationality in human affairs." Although this essay came two years after my time in Islamabad, these are the concepts

with which I tried to infuse my teaching of critical thinking as well.

Because my engagement with Pakistan was shaped so much by my anti-imperialist perspective, I found Hoodbhoy's suggestions to be challenging to my own beliefs. I was not Pakistani after all, but I wanted to at least make some small contribution to the people who had been my hosts, not only in the Pakistani university but, indeed, on the Pakistani left. It was clear that if I wanted to continue to work on these questions, I would have to continue to use all the tools of "critical thinking" that I had sought to teach at IIU-I.

Still, there was no way that my experience would be anything like that of a Pakistani faculty member, not least because of physical risks. The Taliban target all schools. At the university level, in September 2014 in Karachi, two scholars, Muhammad Shakil Auj and Maulana Masood Baig, were shot dead. Professor Auj had been accused of blasphemy by fellow scholars at his university and denounced at a seminary for a speech he had made in 2012⁷. Visiting scholars and foreign instructors, especially those visiting for a short time, don't face these risks, but they also contribute much less. Ultimately, I got much more out of my visit to Pakistan than I gave in my course. My summer there helped shape my thinking about the relationships between religion, politics, and social class, and about the history and evolution of the region.

Evaluating the Course

I decided at the outset that I will not challenge students' religious beliefs directly, even though students asked me right away how critical thinking fit with faith. I feared that if I present the two in opposition, forcing students to take sides, they will choose faith and discard critical thinking. If, instead, I could introduce critical thinking concepts through a series of concrete examples, students may follow their own line of reasoning, whether during the class or later. Grading the assignments supported this conclusion, as I could see that students' prior educational background, including the systemic and curricular problems discussed above, were a barrier to what I was trying to teach. Did some of them get over the barrier?

I consider it a victory that despite the pressure to disband the co-educational classroom, we persevered. It seemed to Bob and me that the female students' insistence, not to mention their numerical preponderance, was key to that outcome. The women's campus of IIU-I brought more students, more curiosity, and more energy to my class than the men's campus. The class discussion of Lu Xun's argument that women need to have material and economic security in order to achieve liberation was easily understood by the female students and ultimately accepted by the male students as well. In our last class students asked me some very interesting political questions. "Sir, do you think you can have democracy if the people are not prepared? Should they do a course on critical thinking before they have democracy?" I replied in the spirit of the Spanish anarchists: "The best way to prepare for

democracy is to participate in one, by having the power to make decisions democratically."

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Though the course would have been more successful technically (in terms of understanding premises and conclusions, learning how to argue and summarize, etc.) had we had more time for more reading and writing, I do believe my students got the idea of critical thinking as a way to approach life, work, and politics. To use the words of the ex-leftist Pakistani writer who emailed me, they "grasped the notion of critical thinking," of evaluating claims in light of evidence and arguments for logical consistency. In that sense the course was a vindication of my belief in teaching students who have a very different point of view than the teacher: find points in common, pose problems that can lead to more general insights, and don't push taboos directly. One must pick one's way carefully between the risk of missing opportunities to challenging students and the risk of failing to earn students' trust.

In my exit interview with the Rector of the university, as we went over my syllabus, I told him of the paradox I saw in the students—the appetite for discussing religious and political questions, but also the reality that tackling them directly in class is likely to encounter resistance. The Rector's own approach was very cautious. Responding to my concerns about missed opportunities and the risks of

pushing too much, his final comment to me was minimalist: "hopefully, probably, one day, we might make some small change in young people's thinking."

Endnotes

1. Robert Jensen, "Universal Patterns within Cultural Diversity: Patriarchy Makes Men Crazy and Stupid", MRZine, August 7, 2008: <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2008/jensen080708.html>.
2. Reading the professor's own words is the best introduction to the issue: Paul Grayson, "Why I said no to gender segregation at York", Huffington Post Canada, January 17/2014: http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/paul-grayson/j-paul-grayson-york-professor_b_4611750.html.
3. Eqbal Ahmad worked with Frantz Fanon during the Algerian Revolution, participated in the anti-Vietnam war movement in the United States, worked with Edward Said and was an advocate of the Palestinians, helped found the Transnational Institute, and worked for peace in South Asia—among many other things. He taught at Hampshire College.
4. A.H. Nayyar and Ahmad Salim, eds. *Subtle Subversion: the State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan*. Report of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute Pakistan, Islamabad. 2014. <http://eacpe.org/content/uploads/2014/05/The-Subtle-Subversion.pdf>.
5. Indeed, some of Hoodbhoy's books, including *Islam and Science*, are available on eacpe.org as PDFs.
6. Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Can the Left Become Relevant to Islamic Pakistan?" *New Politics* Summer 2010, Vol XIII-1, No. 49
7. Zia ur-Rehman, "A Pakistani Scholar accused of Blasphemy Is Shot Dead", *New York Times*, Sept 18, 2014.



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