



The Problematique of Education in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Education in Pakistan hasn't made any headway. Neither the planners nor the implementers have succeeded in realizing the aims and objectives set forth in the successive Educational Policies. This paper attempts to study the causes which have resulted in the resent stalemate. The author thinks that one of the reasons is the lack of emphasis on the acquisition of critical mass of modern education. The dichotomy of faith and reason in Pakistan's educational policies has not allowed the emergence of that critical mass of intellectual vigour which could promote independent thinking among the students. The author is of the opinion that the concept of the "Ideology of Pakistan" has had its share in the intellectual stalemate obtaining today.

On top of the above cited malaise the commercialization of education rampant in the world nowadays has also had its salutary effect on the Third World countries and Pakistan is no exception. What is urgently required by Pakistan is that due emphasis should be paid to the study of social sciences. The Think-Tank of Social Scientists, Anthropologists, Philosophers and Historians should start a reexamination of the paradigm and suggest alternatives without sacrificing the basic value system.

1. THE PROBLEMATIQUE

Education is still a problem area in Pakistan may be a platitude but it is stark reality. There exists a basic contradiction between the socio-political paradigm on the one hand and education on the other. Education is supposed to help shaping political norms in a given social setup and, to a very great extent, is capable of making its own policies. On the other hand if the socio-political norms are based on ideologies, they become essentialist in nature and leave little room for education to play its role in society. The recent examples in our history are those communist societies where state policies were coerced into definite molds leaving no room for freedom of thought and action. Unfortunately, inspite of the failures of ideologies, both as a philosophical concept as well as of socio-political systems, Pakistan is still struggling under the very same paradigm for its social policies. Unfortunately, unlike communism which is based on a well worked out philosophy of history and social theory, amenable to intellectual refutation or amendment 'Islamic ideology' is pseudo concept, having no intellectual sound basis and, since it is divine is not amenable to

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argumentation. This paradigm suits well to the feudalists and religionists, both having in-built antagonism for education. The situation worsens because muslims as a whole have been suffering from the delusion that they are the possessors of knowledge and that their knowledge is self sufficient. They also suffer from the phobia that an exposure to new ideas would threaten their identity and would weaken their belief system. If we look back at our history which has been very proudly presented as one of the best, we would be perplexed to note that muslim intellectuals (ulema) have constantly refused to study the ideas which emerged in the wake of modernism, but were eager to claim that whatever the modernist were saying has already been said before by the muslims. Most of what has been written during the last 600 years or so has been either polemical or apologetic. This attitude has been starkly contrary to the behaviour of the 2nd and 3rd century muslim scholars who, very eagerly welcomed Greek Sciences and Greek Logic during the early days of Islam.

No doubt that muslims during the 19th and 20th century have been mostly under the subjugation of Imperial powers but they failed to make the best use of the worst situation. Imperialism with all its evils did bring new ideas along with it and opened new windows which could have been used by the muslims to get a fresh air of new ideas. The efforts of Syed Ahmed Khan were opposed vigorously and muslims were discouraged to acquire education at the institutions established in Aligarh. It created a huge intellectual deficit for the muslim community living in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. During the days of Indian independence movement the critical mass of intellect as well as the intellectual capacity of muslim leaders was very mediocre, though we had very sincere and educated leaders like Mohd Ali Jauhar, Hasrat Mohani, Allama Mashriqi, Maulana Maududi etc. None of them were able to visualize the world they would be living in within the next 50 to 100 years or so. It was basically their intellectual incapacity and inadequate numbers that prevented a thorough analysis of socio-political reality of the subcontinent at that time. Most of the time they were reacting to momentary contingencies without a well thought out plan for the future. Some of the intellectuals glorified the past and some of them tried to accommodate modern ideas within the Islamic perspectives without really providing a logical base for such a venture. Iqbal specially during his "Reconstruction" period thought about the problem seriously and provided a really sound basis for developing a modern social system on the basis of religious experience but unfortunately when he started talking about Ijتهad he also became the victim of the deductive logic that the traditional Islamic jurisprudence developed during the early centuries of Islam.

With this backdrop education had to suffer from an intractable malaise because power brokers of different hues and colours wanted to use it to achieve their own ends. Admitted that in every society there has always been a certain amount of political role in determining aims of education and its structure, but in Pakistan political objectives went on changing from one regime to an other. The issues of language, of ideology, of sub nationalities, and of religion always played a discordant role in the decision making. The three major education policies inflicted on Pakistan i.e., of Ayub Khan, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Zia ul Haq have been, successively, pulling apart the fabric of education of the country. Now a fresh thinking has started which has also become a direct concern of international power centres influencing public policy in Pakistan (Hattaway, 2005).

The problematique was neither sudden nor unexpected. What is now termed as the "Ideology of Pakistan" is a post independence concept and has inherent contradictions. Prior to the creation of Pakistan no serious attempt could be made to clarify and work out the rationality involved in establishing an independent muslim state (Ahmed, 2002). The result was a lack of clear cut and harmonious socio-political culture aggravated by a tremendous intellectual deficit that Pakistan inherited. The document prepared as a result of the first Education Conference held in December 1947 reflects the lack of precision and contains vague expressions about Pakistani identity, suitable system of education and an ambition to become modern and scientific.

In the evolution of an appropriate education system two main problems got entangled in the politics of education, one was medium of instruction and the other Pakistan Ideology. Conflicting opinions on both issues delayed the formation of a positive plan of action till 1959 when Ayub Khan constituted a Commission on National Education which produced a systematic report dealing with all the major policy issues including incorporation of the role of religion (ideology) in the system of education and the medium of instruction. The major defect of the policy was too much of centralization and concentration of power, less academic freedom and bureaucratization of educational structure. But with the wind of political change Bhutto ousted the policy, nationalized most of the educational institutions and gave more say to the stake holders in running the affairs of the University, resulting in a sort of trade unionism. The story was repeated again with the overthrow of Bhutto and this time education was Islamized and restrained the academic freedom. All these policies, due to an absence of a strong intellectual base, were filtered through the perception of the bureaucrats and reflect not only their expertise and competence but also their interests and limitations as a class. Now a new education policy is in making, and I do not expect it to be substantively different from its predecessors, though it may change in some of its saliences and try to balance between Islam and modernity. Nevertheless its substantive centrality and bureaucratic approach is hardly expected to change. Pakistani intellect is not yet ready to allow academic freedom, which only, can generate ideas and give an effective direction to public policy. [It is ironic to note that in the 21st century America seems to be sliding back into the coercive ideological mould where teachers are urged to teach 'intelligent design' theory of creation and where a University professor would not be allowed to speak his mind freely on Holocaust or 9/11 event. I do hope that this phase of McCarthyism would soon be over and the academia would not be restrained from the incessant pursuit of truth, whatever the truth may be].

This problematique of education in Pakistan is, as a matter of fact the outcome of a malaise that is more fundamental in nature, and that relates to the paradigm under which the muslim mind works.

2. ISLAMIZATION OF EDUCATION

The issue which is now catching the attention of policy makers is modernization of the madarssah education. This, in general, is a delayed reaction to Islamization of Knowledge - an idea floated by the modern educated Islamicists and eagerly welcomed by the classicists since it bestows upon them an authority and a new opportunity which increases their influence in educational institutions and the society at large. The agenda of Islamization of education started by making Islamic learning a compulsory subject for graduate students through Statutory Regulations and for which University Acts were amended. Disciplines like Islamic Economics, Islamic Theory of State, Islamic Constitution, Islamic Law came in vogue and attempts were made to redesign the whole gamut of knowledge on the basis of Islamic principles. Such attempts could not succeed because the paradigms of Religion and Sciences have no common basis. The only thing accomplished was sporadically teaching a few subjects at the University level creating no impact on the body of knowledge or on the personalities of students. Where political expediencies necessitated, the demands of the religionists were accommodated, like Islamic provisions in the Constitution, or the so called Islamic Banking. There seems to be a failure to appreciate on the part of Islamicists that scientific and empirical knowledge cannot be coerced into apriori moulds. The scientific theories are liable to improvement, and rejection whereas, religious principles are immune to any change. Religion may help in providing and protecting moral and social values, but even these values when actually applied to existential situations may demand changes in older laws and patterns of society.

The demand of Islamization of Knowledge got mutated into an activism for Islamizing society which seemed easier to its proponents, because it meant only applying the civil and criminal laws expounded by the muslim jurists in the past. Due to local political

expediencies and the international agenda for manipulating earth resources the move of Islamizing society, combined with an aversion to the West constituted a threat to both the internal and external aspects of security.

In Pakistan a by-product of the Afghan war is proliferation of madrassahs which supply human raw material for political activism of a certain type, which is, often violent. Hence the demand of Modernization of madrassahs through introducing disciplines such as, IT, English Language and Sciences. The assumption of the modernists policy planners is same as that of the Islamicist, i.e. that you can change the mindset of students by teaching a few subjects in a class room. The present reformers of madrassah education fail to realize that similar institutions have been working in the muslim world since ages, and have developed a de facto separation between religion and the state. Occasional political involvement of muslim clergy in political activism against the state was not due to the involvement of madrassah as an institution but was due to political movements supported by power groups. The relationship of madrassah as an institution and the present political activism is almost the same as that of universities and political parties e.g. the Muslim League and Aligarh University during the period of struggle for independence in the Indian subcontinent. The political activism does not necessarily originate from the madrassahs but is influenced and exploited by power brokers from outside. Incidentally, with the type of education they get in madrassahs and due to the absence of any useful employment opportunities, they become an easy fodder to power hungry politicians.

A reform proposed on the lines suggested by the government will not work as the origin of the idea lies somewhere else. This is hardly the occasion where the problem can be discussed in full. It may suffice to point out that during the very early days of the muslim rule, a de facto separation between the State and religion took place. Religion had no occasion to interfere in State polices or selection of political rulers and authorities. Since there was no qualitative change in the social patterns the early criminal and civil laws remained intact with minor changes, and the function of the religionist as a part of civil society was to protect those laws and to advise the rulers to behave justly. Madrassahs, became vehicles of learning the laws and training man power for civil services. They never were a threat to the political authority of the day and hardly ever confronted the State as an institution. Nevertheless, they created a mindset which remains static to the present day.

What changed the scenario is politicalization of religion in 20th century mainly in reaction to colonolization of muslim lands by the Western powers. Religion played an effective motivating force for political parties seeking political independence of their homeland, a time when slogans like 'Islam is not a Religion but a Way of Life' were raised and ideas like Islamic political, economic and social systems were floated. Political role of religion has been due to this new understanding of religion as an ideology, a concept not generated in madrassahs but in modern educational institutions or outside madrassahs.

In the undivided India Maudoodi played a pivotal role in popularizing this idea, and eventually established a politico-religious party to strive for the 'ideology of Islam'. This modern interpretation of religion ran counter to the ideas of madrassah educated moulvis who were happy with the conservative classical interpretation of Islam with a de-facto separation of State and Religion. It is only recently and mostly due to the Afghan war that the two joined hands together. No doubt, the politicised Islam started playing its part much earlier when the twenty two points agreement on the basic features of an Islamic Constitution was signed by the ulema of all shades, mainly at the instance of Jamat Islami and where Zafar Ahmad Ansari, an old Muslim Leaguer played a crucial role. Madrassah, at a conceptual level still played a very marginal role and that also not as an institution. Now a particular mindset has taken roots and madrassahs have become vehicles of political activism of a certain type. Can one change this scenario only by introducing a couple of new disciplines to the curriculum without any change in the political paradigm of understanding religion. This is a problem which needs to be tackled, at a much higher

intellectual level for which unfortunately a critical mass of intellectual resource is not available in the Muslim world. Coming back to madrassah education reforms, ideally there should be one educational curriculum for 12-13 years of education before which no specialization should be allowed. This curriculum should be broad-based and should follow modern pedagogical insights placing emphases on learning and discovering, rather than on teaching and pontificating. After 12-13 years of proper and adequate education a student would have some sense to decide for himself, as to what he wants to be. If he wants to go to a madrassah or seminary, they should be open to him with highest possible standards of scholarship of his own choice. But if he wants to opt for Medicine or Engineering or Liberal Arts, opportunity should be made available to him to prove his mettle in these areas. The important point is to let a broadly educated youth partake in the decision-making process. Implementing the policy of making primary education compulsory may be a step in the right direction.

The reason, I advocate 12-13 years of common primary and secondary education as a precondition of entering a seminary is that religion is a serious matter and its teaching and research cannot be left in the hands of half-lettered teachers commonly employed in the madrassahs. Moreover the pedagogical methodology used in madrassahs freezes the minds of the learners and makes them incapable of entertaining fresh ideas or increasing the horizons of knowledge even at a later stage of their lives. Unfortunately the condition of the present primary and secondary level education is also far from satisfactory. A serious attempt is required to re-orientate the school education and change its pedagogical methodology. This can not be done merely by bureaucratic machinery.

3. PRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION

Part of my education was in Karachi at a time when almost all colleges were run by philanthropic associations aided by the Government. In spite of the sudden post-partition upheavals, these institutions did, some how or other, manage to maintain some quality of education. But with the passage of time education in Pakistan has suffered from inefficiency, neglect and lack of proper orientation. The inability of the Government to provide appropriate opportunities for the growing population of Pakistan and a disinterest in the faculty development created a vacuum in the educational field in Pakistan. The vacuum started getting filled by private efforts which were a mix of philanthropic and commercial motivations. Commercialization of education created a dissatisfaction amongst the faculty which were, often than not, exploited by private managements. Nationalization of education in Pakistan indeed helped in safeguarding the interest of the teachers but eventually proved counter-productive to the cause of education. Once given the security of job, the teachers started cutting corners and eventually caused acute sufferance to education.

Recently private enterprise took keen interest in education, which again, is a mix of altruism and utter commercialism. Education, especially higher education requires more per-capita investment than primary and secondary and can never become a good business except at the cost of education itself. Those countries which have established private universities and institutions are supported by endowments, donations and other independent sources of income and not more than 35% of the cost is recovered from the revenue generated by the fees levied on students. Institutions of higher learning which are saving money for their investors mostly do it at the cost of education. I also feel perturbed by the idea of mono discipline Universities and Teaching Institutes. A university by its very nature is an institution which does more than merely produce manpower for certain skilled jobs. It is a place where a student lives not in a cocoon of a particular discipline but interacts with a bigger universe and becomes part of an inter-related whole. A university, by definition, should try to create a whole man rather than a mere skilled worker. For a teaching institute it should be necessary to provide a broad-based knowledge. The idea of mono-discipline Institutes of higher learning is a product of 20th century when it was felt that universities were not producing the right type of skilled human resource required

by society. The MIT was established in America to address this situation. But if you look at the American Education System and the disciplines taught at the Institute you would find that the system itself provides a broad base of knowledge to students and makes sure that the human resource it produces is not only a cog in a big machine but a useful member of the society with firm values and ideals. When a person enters the portals of higher education institutions does not get a chance to widen his horizons of knowledge he would remain an incomplete and partial being, unable to see the complexity of the larger world which he would encounter after getting a piece of paper called the Degree. Unfortunately in Pakistan specialization starts right immediately after primary education and by the time a student reaches class seventh he has to decide which way he has to go. By the time he completes his twelve years of education his learning becomes too narrow and one sided. The pedagogical methodology commonly followed in Pakistani educational institutions treats learning not as a process of self discovery, but of regimentation which aggravates the situation more. As far back as 1241AD John of Garland was lamenting commercialization of education. True scholars, he laments are poor and are considered as witless, whereas, every clever person is after medicine or law where he invests money in education and earns profits immediately after. Cardinal Newman, while establishing Catholic University in Ireland was also critical of the loss of a unifying, wholesome and philosophical outlook of life and complains of the fragmentation of knowledge in the universities.

I am afraid that Pakistani planners and the educationists are also loosing sight of an important factor of higher education. They, alongwith, political leaders do not tire themselves repeating ad-nauseum that Pakistan, needs science and technology. No body can deny the need, but, what is lost sight of is that science and technology cannot deliver the goods by themselves unless there is a strong 'idea structure' behind them and unless they befit and mesh with the social and conceptual development of the society. I am reminded of an incident when a Minister of Education, who himself was an 'educated' and a thorough gentleman, insisted on naming a private university as Medical University rather than the University of Health Sciences as I suggested to him. He probably became apprehensive that behind the demand of the new nomenclature there might be sinister motives. Again it is only in Pakistan where you would find a University named as "Government College University", an oxymoron which has been accepted both by the Government and Higher Education Commission in their eagerness to increase the number of universities. and by the educational elite because a 'University Professor' sounds better than a 'College Professor'.

Reverting back to present commercialism in education, which is termed by the government as public-private partnership and through which the govt. has found the moral justification for abandoning its responsibility to private investors. It is a retrograde action as compared to the early days in Pakistan where private philanthropy was encouraged to share the burden with government which in its turn provided financial support in the form of yearly grants to the institutions. In the countries where private enterprise takes part in higher education activities the government's assistance comes in the form of tax exemptions on endowments, donations and grants in aid, as well as infra-structure support in the form of concessional power / water and other rates, building road and transport links, or increasing public transport facilities to commuters. The government should evolve a set of rules on these lines, and then private investors as well as philanthropic associations should be encouraged to invest money in education. Unfortunately the bureaucratic mindset can only think in terms of wielding power and controlling the Governing Bodies of the universities through its nominees. In spite of the fact that the new prototype charter contains a number of good suggestions, the actual governance of private universities has been vested in the statutory authority of the Chancellors, who normally are the owners or investors and in most cases do not even know as to what a University means. Even the older charters left enough room to the owners to over-ride the decisions of those more knowledgeable than themselves i.e., the Vice Chancellors, Faculty, Deans etc. The owners lustily enjoy the authority and power they wield over Deans, Faculty and scholars working in the Universities. The Government or the Higher Education Commission have not yet devised any regimen of autonomous auditing of academic and financial structures of educational institutions

and making it public to keep a vigil on the behavior of management as well as faculty, without authoritative controls. Academic institutions can prosper only in an atmosphere of academic freedom and can be regulated by controls created, guarded and monitored again by academicians. The government or a private investor is the most inappropriate authority to guide, monitor and advise the institutions on corrective measures.

That education has become a branch of political economy which is necessary for industrialization is not denied, but it is different from its commercialization. The latter is gnawing at the roots of Higher Education in a number of ways. The first and foremost is the utter inability of valuing any thing except in terms of monetary profits. Educators would pick up a commodity which is saleable in the market and would try to maximize the quantity without caring for the quality. Most of the private institutions of higher learning are least concerned about the standards of education even in fields like Medicine and Surgery. Peripatetic Faculty is in vogue and a teacher now earns more in teaching in a number of institutions and getting paid on hourly basis. Commercialism has afflicted even the public universities in the form of evening programmes where students pay more because they deserve less. One of the important function of institutions of higher learning is to expand the horizons of knowledge. If a Professor teaches two courses in the morning, two in the evening, examines and marks the transcripts, works as invigilator at annual examinations and performs routine administrative duties of the University, how can one expect that he would have time and energy left to devote himself to research. Universities are not like secondary schools where the function of teacher ends by delivering the same capsule of knowledge day after day and year after year. Once a visiting Professor from America at the University of Karachi termed it as a half- day university where both the faculty and students leave the premises immediately after noon. The idea to use the afternoons as a second shift like that of a factory, to produce more graduates at a higher cost may double the number of ill-educated nincompoops branded as graduates. Universities, where tax payers money is spent should never be allowed to dilute the educational standards nor to sell education in any form.

4. IMPORT AND EXPORT

A new development of commercialization of education is its import and export which is termed a win-win situation both for the buyer and the seller. Facing financial constraints because of rising costs of higher education and specially after 9/11 when the inflow of foreign students, a dependable source of extra revenues, could not be guaranteed, the universities in advanced countries have started 'exporting' education to developing countries. (The third biggest source of income of England in the future would be through the export of education). Since 2000 the number of branch campuses world-wide has roughly doubled. Foreign satellite campuses have become a small but growing segment of the \$30 billion international education industry. In Dubai, with the backing of the government a cluster of overseas colleges from India's Mahatma Gandhi University to the St. Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics have set up out posts in the knowledge village. Qatar is paying not only for the state of the art buildings, but also for staff bonuses. By 2012 Singapore hopes to enroll 150,000 outside students working as a supplier of imported 'goods'. The West considers education trade a good way to represent itself to the Arab countries rather than trading in guns and oil. Pakistan has toying with the idea of establishing six engineering universities through importing human resource from advanced countries. Many Western institution now offer their degrees through franchise arrangements with local partners.

All this seems to be a game in which all players win. Students save the money required to go abroad and pay for the living cost as well as cost of education and also suffer cultural alienation; and the Western countries can keep the potential terrorist at bay. How this new form of commercialization is going to effect socially and culturally is an issue which should be carefully considered by importing countries and particularly Pakistan. The

benefiting class of society by such a programme can enhance the divide between the haves and have-nots and can further weaken the role that a University ought to play in the creation of ideas and the advancement of culture. Along, with the question of cost the question of quality is also important. Manufactures of goods do compromise on the standards for the consumers who can pay less for the commodity. If this starts happening with education also, which is likely, then the loss of the poor importer would become perpetual. A country like Pakistan cannot solely live on imported goods howsoever cheap they may be. Such commercialized institutions are no replacement of the genuine indigenous educational institutions that we must develop ourselves.

5. THE PARADIGM

Reverting back to the necessity of a paradigm change for understanding our culture based on religious percepts. It is a sine-qua-non for re-structuring our society on a sound basis. Any cosmetic changes in the madarassah curriculum or introducing religious courses in primary and secondary schools would neither make a person Islamic nor modern. The paradigm I am referring to which requires a shift is the authoritarian frame work on which our social, legal, educational and religious life is structured. The social mindset is feudal, the legal is authoritarian, the educational is regimentational and the religious is totally deductive and formal. The religious mindset is not even prepared to entertain the idea that moral values can be intrinsic. We need an authentication from an all powerful monarch through whose fiat actions and concepts become valuable or lose their values. The legal structure of muslim society draws its authentication from certain major premises accepted and approved by a society which existed more than a thousand years ago and it is assumed that it requires no change or improvement.

What is more urgently required by Pakistan is a critical mass of Social Scientists, Anthropologists, Philosophers and Historians, who should start a re-examination of the paradigm and suggest alternatives without sacrificing the basic value system. The qualitative leap from the middle ages to modernity was made possible through such a shift of the paradigm of Knowledge. Unfortunately, we are still mentally living in the middle ages and hope that scientific inventions and adoption of Information Technology would bring about a change in the basic structure of our society. I am not denying the fact that development in science and technology does have an impact on social structures but the real benefit of these developments can only be obtained when there is no conflicting mindset operating at large in the society.

The governments in the past probably realized the urgency of the problem and the necessity of solving it and constituted a number of institutions and commissions to work in this direction, important ones were the Central Institute of Islamic Research and the Pakistan Historical Commission. During the early days of the establishment of the Islamic Institute, when Dr. Fazal-ur-Rehman was its Director, the Institute did initiate a thinking process to facilitate a possible paradigm shift but unfortunately the powerful lobbies of conservative ideas compelled the State authorities to put a stop to this process. It is not suggested or advocated that the opinion of a particular person or lobby is necessarily wrong or right, what is urged here is only the necessity of starting the thinking process afresh. The Pakistan Historical Commission also failed to rise to the occasion and failed to examine our history objectively. It is unfortunate that such institutions in Pakistan become tools for fulfilling the requirements of the ruling elite. The necessity of establishing such an institutions with complete autonomy is more urgent today than never before. The decisions we take today and in the near future for moulding our society on sound lines may effect our very existence as a composite dynamic society. Since the human resource in Pakistan in these areas is scarce we should draw upon the human resource of the muslim ummah and take the matter more seriously than we have been doing so far. It is much too lop-sided to think about Science and Technology only and neglect the very root cause of the decay of our social structures which can only be addressed by a different paradigm of knowledge.