



The education apartheid

Universal education should be the objective

Pakistan became independent sixty six years ago yet we are nowhere near achieving universal education. The civil society, charitable institutions, foundations and many individuals are doing very noteworthy and valuable work. This has however not made any significant progress in achieving universal education.

Recently Imran Khan has been propagating the idea of single syllabus for the whole country. This certainly is a step in the right direction. The basic problem however is the existence of two different systems – the English and the Urdu medium schools and then there are English medium schools affiliated to British system. In effect we have three different types of schools in addition to the madrassas.

The existence of the privately owned English medium and the British System schools has created an oligarchy in the country because only the rich can afford to send their children to these schools. One would guess that there are no more than few hundred thousand families whose children go to these expensive schools and ultimately enter government services, the armed forces, the superior services, banks and private sector companies. As a result these families dominate all aspects of power and governance in the country.

One major drawback of the present system and policy is that the talent from only these few hundred thousand families is utilized. In other words it will not be untrue to say that the talent from over 99 percent of the population is untapped and the country is deprived of what these children of high IQ would given a level playing field achieve.

Before our independence in the British India there were only a few English medium private schools in what is present Pakistan. One could in fact count them on fingers of one hand: for boys there was Burn's Hall in Abbottabad, Grammar School, St. Patrick and St. Paul in Karachi, St. Anthony and Aitchison College in Lahore. For girls also there were only a few such schools like Sacred Heart in Lahore, Convents in Karachi and Murree. Almost everyone went to government schools which were Urdu medium. I recall attending Government High School Jacob Lines where

Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar's sons were also studying. Dr. Tariq Nishtar who lives in Peshawar would confirm this.

After independence the armed forces established a number of extremely well-run schools in all the provinces however, these were also English medium. One distinction of these schools is that apart from excellent academic standard they inculcated high moral values and national pride in their students.

The main reason for the present divide in our education system is because 66 years have gone by and no one in the civil bureaucracy, in the Armed Forces or the politicians has bothered to pay any attention to the problem. In my opinion the reason behind the proliferation of these private English medium schools and the divide in education is because the official language of the country is still English. The Army, the Air Force, Navy, all the departments of the federal government, all the provincial governments and the Superior Courts employ English for all their work. As a result there is an enormous demand for young men and women to be fluent in English.

There are about 20,000 madaris in the country; they are protected by the 1973 Constitution which permits their establishment. Most of them are members of the Wifaq-ul-Madaris. It may be noted that the madaris are established and run entirely by private donations. The syllabus of the madaris is based upon the Dars-e-Nizami which is over 265 years old because its author Mullah Nizanuddin Sehavi died in 1748 at Firangi Mahal, Lucknow in undivided India. It is about time that the madaris take cognizance of this and update their syllabus particularly with respect to non-religious subjects like Balaghah (Rhetoric), Mantiq (Logic), Riyadiyat (Arithmetic and geometry). They need to examine all the non-religious courses and update them in accordance with the latest teaching methods and scientific knowledge. For example for arithmetic, the Kumon system must be introduced. The government may consider sending a representative team of ulema of all schools of thought to study the curricula of some of well-known institutions like Al-Azhar, the Islamic University, Madinah, International Islamic University, Malaysia, Qom University, Iran and examine the school curricula in Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE and Malaysia.

It is very important that the federal government sets up a commission consisting of members of the parliament, the educationists and the ulema to determine the education policy for the country. We need to decide and put it in black and white as to what we want to achieve from our school education. Do we want to inculcate atheism, teach materialistic values, and promote lust for money and greed? Is it our object to impart national pride, Islamic moral values and produce spiritually well anchored young men and women? These are the matters which need to be decided once for all because without this the education policy will remain directionless.

Once the direction of the education policy has been decided in order to rapidly achieve universal education and remove this unethical divide in education it is essential to make the National language the official language of the country. Punjab even before independence was the largest

publisher of Urdu in British India. In KPK and Sindh Urdu is the language of commerce and local correspondence. In 1973 the government of Baluchistan of Chief Minister Sardar Ataullah Mengal adopted Urdu as the official language. This excellent policy was reversed by Bhutto after he dismissed the elected Baluchistan government. Furthermore the nationalizing of the schools and colleges by Bhutto was also one of his major blunders. Zia-ul-Haq's policy of permitting privately owned schools without any control of their education policy has been a disaster because it has resulted in the total commercialization of school education. These schools do not inculcate any moral values or national pride in fact these schools do not educate but impart rote literacy. The lack of national pride and absence of high moral values in the most of the present generation can largely be attributed to these schools.

Initially it would be best for the armed forces to adopt Urdu; this would not raise objections from any quarter. Thereafter the Federal Government and the provinces should follow. The lower judiciary already uses Urdu. The Superior Judiciary would be the last institution to change over to Urdu because considerable work would be required for them to adopt Urdu.

Urdu was the official language of the government of the Nizam of Hyderabad. One can easily obtain all the documents pertaining to the system obtaining there to adopt with changes where necessary.

Once Urdu has been made the official language it will be possible to adopt a single uniform education system, remove the present immoral divide in education and progress to achieve universal education would be possible.

