

AN EVALUATION OF THE SHARIF, HAMOODUR REHMAN AND NUR KHAN REPORTS ON EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

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The three reports were written by commissions appointed by the Government of Pakistan to examine the educational system of Pakistan. The commissions were appointed at important junctures in the history of Pakistan. On each occasion Pakistan was going through a period of political transition.

The National Education Commission, also known as the Sharif Commission, was appointed in December, 1958, soon after General Ayub Khan had carried out his military coup and seized power. The Commission's Report was to help the Ayub regime reorganize education as part of its overall plan to put the whole economic and political structure of the country along a more rational and dynamic path.

The National Education Commission Report is very representative of the Ayub regime ethos. It calls for the need to have private enterprise in education and less reliance on the government. It calls for more initiative from the people, and blames the lack of it on the colonial heritage of Pakistan.¹ But these are general statements, for at no point in the Report is it clarified as to at what level of education would the Commission recommend a greater degree of participation of the private sector.

It was also observed in the Report that the education in Pakistan was of an extremely general kind. It had been designed by the foreign rulers to produce government servants.² This system was therefore not geared to meeting the manpower needs of a developing country. The two reports on education written subsequently, have also drawn attention to the fact that there are little or no facilities for scientific and technical education in the country.

The Commission made some recommendations which changed the fundamental structure of the education system. One of these was the increase of pre-university duration of education from ten to twelve years. It was argued in the Report that all over the world twelve years of schooling is required before a student can qualify to enter the university, and so this change would bring the Pakistani education system more in line with the rest of the world. Two years of study for the Intermediate certificate was to follow ten years of study for the matriculation.

At the degree level, the Commission recommended three years of study instead of the prevailing two years. It cited the example of the U.S.A., where the bachelor's degree ordinarily took four years.

The recommendation of the Report to have tutorials as a supplementary form of teaching at the university level was unrealistic.³ The idea of tutorials was taken from Oxford and Cambridge Universities, where the teacher usually meets one or two of his students at least once or twice a week, holds discussions with them, and guides them in their work. What the Report failed to bring out was that this system is only prevalent in the two most elitist universities of England, as the other universities cannot afford it. In the U.S.A. this system does not exist, not even at any of the Ivy League universities. It is difficult to see how the tutorial system could have been regarded as feasible in a Third World country like Pakistan, with such limited resources.

The Report got to the heart of the problem of primary education when it pointed out that only 50% of the children go to primary school, and even among these the drop-out rate is as high as 75% in certain areas. It recommended that education be made compulsory for the first five years of primary school, in ten years' time. The Commission hoped that this would also bring the wastage, due to a high drop-out rate, to an end.

The Report gave some very specific suggestions as to how children could be given technical training and taught skills in practical arts. It recommended that in the secondary school there should be a core of basic subjects like science, mathematics and the national language, in addition to the optional subjects. It is the optional subjects which should give the child an opportunity to acquire vocational training and skills. After the eighth class, the Report advised, students should be given a choice of joining vocational schools or continuing with general education. Students would have

the opportunity of joining polytechnics, which would provide them with supervisory training as technicians, after the tenth class.⁴

The Report also spelt out what the language policy in education should be, and quoted the latest research on the issue. It recommended that the children should be taught in their vernacular language till class five, as best educational results are obtained when children are taught in their mother tongue at the early stages of education. The Report recommended the adoption of the national language as the medium of instruction, from class six onwards. It was to be reduced to the position of a compulsory language at that stage. In East Pakistan Bengali was to replace English in the same way. It is interesting to note that nothing was done to promote the use of Bengali in West Pakistan and of Urdu in East Pakistan. No measure was recommended by the report which would have brought the two provinces closer to each other, in the understanding or use of the other province's language.

The National Education Commission recommended changes in the organizational structure of the universities. They advised a curtailment of elections of teachers to the various bodies of the universities, like the Syndicate and the Academic Council. A system of nomination was to replace the elections, thus increasing the power of the Vice Chancellor enormously.⁵ The implementation of these recommendations proved to be highly unpopular once they were implemented, and contributed to the agitation on university campuses in the middle sixties.

One of the positive contributions of the National Education Commission was its advice that a central co-ordinating body for all the universities be created on the model of the University Grants Commission in London. Such a body would prevent a duplication of the education programmes and also issue the funds for the universities.

The Report also recommended a modification of the examination system in which the performance of the student should not be judged entirely by external examination. It recommended instead that twenty-five per cent of the student's marks should be the teacher's evaluation of his work.⁷

The Commission on National Education had submitted its report to the Government in August, 1959 and the Government promulgated its recommendations in the form of the University

Ordinances in 1961. A year later student agitation against the Ordinances erupted and carried on intermittently till 1964. Due to this mounting hostility of the students towards the Government, most of the student organizations supported the candidature of the opposition parties candidate, Miss Fatima Jinnah, in the Presidential elections.⁸

It was against this background that the Commission on Students Problems and Welfare was appointed in December, 1964. This Commission, which is also known as the Hamoodur Rehman Commission, had very different terms of reference from the Sharif Commission. It had been appointed "to examine the provisions of the University Ordinances and suggest modifications wherever necessary". The Commission had been formed to deal with, what had become, a political problem. This was reflected in their method of work, for they interviewed a whole cross-section of students, teachers, educationists, and student organizations across the country.

The Commission took the view in its report that the education system and the students demands had been neglected for so long that the discontent of the students finding no outlet had resulted in agitation. The report absolved the students of any responsibility for resorting to agitation and militancy, and placed the blame on the establishment which had been unresponsive to their needs. Although the Commission took a very liberal view of the student agitation, it did not accede to their demand for the right to strike.⁹

The report said nothing on primary and secondary education which had not already been said by the report of the National Education Commission. It accepted the failure of the Second Plan, which had hoped to raise the percentage of the school-going children, in the six to eleven age group, from 42 to 60 per cent. The Second Plan had only been able to achieve its target upto 46 per cent. The attempts at reducing the drop-out rate had only succeeded by 30 per cent.¹⁰

While dealing with education at the secondary school level the report expressed the same concern as the Sharif Report about the lack of technical and pre-vocational training, but its recommendations on the issue were too general. The Sharif Report had suggested a specific organization of courses at the school and at the college level, and what the relation of the technical with the general education should be. The Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report

only mentioned the need to have diversified courses.¹¹

The Commission in its report came out against the three year pass course at the degree level, which had been introduced at the recommendation of the National Education Commission, and was coexisting with the two year pass course. This three year pass course was one of the more controversial issues of the University Ordinances. The Report said:

We are not in favour of the re-introduction of the three year pass course because we are not satisfied that another year at this stage will make any material difference when the foundation upon which the additional knowledge has to be imparted is of poor or indifferent quality.¹²

The Hamoodur Rehman Commission, as mentioned earlier, had been formed to deal with the student agitation against the University Ordinances. The authoritarian structure that had been instituted as a result of the recommendations of the National Education Commission, was liberalized on the recommendations of this Commission. The Commission maintained that in some instances the Ordinances had gone beyond the recommendations of the National Education Commission. It cited the abolition of the university senates as one such case. The Commission recommended the restoring of a much smaller senate with about 70 to 80 members instead of the unwieldy 150 to 200 members. It said that:

... even the executive acts of the highest executive heads of the provinces and the State are not exempt from criticism. It is anachronistic in such a context for vice-chancellors and other university functionaries to claim such an immunity.¹³

But it restricted the elective element to the registered graduates, while in the case of teachers the principle of rotation was to operate. However, this body's function was restricted to discussing only the finance and general policy of the university. In the syndicate the elective principle was only restored for two members.

The issue which had caused the greatest distress to the students was the power given to the vice-chancellor to withdraw a degree or a diploma if the student is convicted of moral turpitude by the courts. In the case of the Dacca University, he had the power to withdraw the degree or diploma even without the conviction by the courts, on the decision of a two-thirds majority in the Syndicate.¹⁴ The Commission recommended that this provision of the University Ordinances be repealed.

The Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report had served the purpose of diffusing a politically explosive student problem. It mo-

of the Government continues to be English, this has helped to perpetuate the class domination of the majority by a minority, who have been privileged enough to afford education in elite schools with English as the medium of instruction.

This is the first report on education which recognized literacy as a major problem, and in fact specifically mentioned that the National Education Commission Report of 1959 placed too much emphasis on secondary education and neglected elementary education. It drew attention to the fact that with a 20% literacy rate, Pakistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. This is also the first Government report on education which suggested ways of making elementary education more widespread and increasing the adult literacy programmes.¹⁷

This document also discussed the problem of the educated unemployed, and the legacy of the colonial system of education which was geared towards producing generalists. It consequently stressed the need to have vocational and technical training at the secondary level for at least 45% of the students entering secondary schools. This, the document argued, would meet the needs of a growing economy and also end the unemployment of the white collar workers.

The Nur Khan Report was revolutionary in its recommendations on how to improve the declining academic standards in the country. It courageously pointed out that unless the position of the teacher in society was improved, the teaching profession would not draw the best talents of the country. The report pointed out that teachers had been paid low salaries in comparison to other similar professions, and that their status have been deliberately kept subordinate to that of bureaucrats who "have been allowed to exercise over them the rights of appointments, promotion, transfer and dismissal".¹⁸

In order to draw the young talent of the country into the teaching profession, the report argued, the remuneration and conditions of work of the teachers would have to be improved. Towards this end it recommended an end to the transfer of teachers from one institution to another. It advised that every institution should advertise its vacancies so that no teacher feels stuck in any institution and is able to improve his position through open competition in another institution.

The report recommended the decentralization of the administration of all educational institutions, from elementary schools to universities. It advised the formation of a board of governors, instead of the Inspectorate, which would take all the decisions. It was argued in the report that this would increase the sense of participation of the teachers in improving the standard of their institutions.¹⁹ But while arguing for decentralization, the report also argued that the Government should have a set of Service Rules and Regulations to make sure that teachers employed in private institutions should be given a certain minimum of pay and emoluments. It also recommended the passing of legislation which would compel private educational institutions to adhere to a certain basic academic standard, and provide a minimum of facilities for the students in their institutions.

The Nur Khan Report was the most creative and original of the three government reports on education that we have discussed. The group of young "whiz kids", led by Nur Khan, were able to point out some basic flaws in the education system which needed rectification before education in Pakistan could make any progress.

The Sharif Report was very important for the development of the education system in Pakistan. It was the first important report of its kind, after the country achieved its independence. But it failed to point out the fatal weakness of Pakistani education, that it did not provide equal opportunity for all, rather it perpetuated the inequalities already present in the society.

On the adoption of the national languages as the medium of instruction, and also as the language in which all the business of the government was to be conducted, it failed to discuss the implications that such a step would have on the standard of education in the country. Central to the language question is the problem of maintaining educational links with the rest of the world. These questions need to be discussed and explored in depth. Increasingly the need for an international language is being felt, and for Pakistanis the English language is the link with the rest of the world.

The Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report was the least original of the three reports. Since this Commission was basically formed to solve the immediate political objective of pacifying the student community and solving the more pressing problems plaguing the educational system, it confined itself to recommending the

liberalization of the organization and administration of the educational institutions.

While the Nur Khan Report has the breadth of vision, which the other reports lack, none of the three discuss the problem of training manpower to meet the needs of the economy in any great depth. Only general statements are made about the need for vocational training. The persistence of the British legacy of providing very general and non-technical education is indicative of the validity of the criticism, that none of these reports worked out in any detail an educational plan which could provide education according to the needs of the country.

NOTES

1. *Report of the Commission on National Education*, Karachi, 1959, p. 5.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
8. *Report of the Commission on Student Problems and Welfare*, Karachi, 1966., p. 6.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
15. *Proposals for a New Education Policy*, Islamabad, July, 1969, p. 12-17.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 18-21.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 25.