

# Let the People Prevail! The Authoritarian System of Education in Pakistan

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*Every educational practice implies a concept of man and the world.*

—Paolo Freire (1972: 21)

**A**ny political system that denies its people freedom and humanity is authoritarian. In ancient and medieval times, the despots used violence to strike fear in the people. In the colonial and postcolonial eras, they used the tools of modern statecraft—the Constitution and procedures of law. Now, global consumerism, while less explicit, uses psychological ways to mold minds.

The following may be said about the authoritarian educational system:

- People are spectators, not participants. Their energies are sublimated into religious and metaphysical worlds, from which they expect false pleasure and succor. Belief in religion and metaphysics “mysteriously determines the course and fortunes of men’s lives...It is easier to assign the causes of things we do not yet understand to forces beyond our control. When the causes of events are known, the future is beheld with greater security” (Machado 1980: 16).
  - Knowing is questioning, and ordinary people cannot question authority. Knowing brings with it freedom: “Freedom is the essence of man. And freedom can be learned” (Machado 1980: 11).
  - Knowing is impeded by memorization, which is a process of amassing facts devoid of a cause-effect perspective, leading to abstraction.
  - Abstract information culminates in an official ideology that is professed as an ultimate truth or reality by the authority. Under despotism, the ideology was
- divine right to rule; under colonialism, the “white man’s burden”; under postcolonialism, again divine rights and abstract doctrines.
  - In the authoritarian relationship, the authority is all-powerful, and the subordinate has no option but to obey. This relationship constitutes the culture: “Society is not simply the aggregate of persons who constitute it. It is that, and also fundamentally the sum of the external conditions of the person, built by them with their decisions and the activities of their daily life. Society is the product of man. As men are, so will their social structures be” (Machado 1980: 15).
  - The prototypes of authoritarian relations can be seen in all institutions. State indoctrination starts with the family, from the birth of a child, then proceeds in school.
  - Authoritarianism breeds one-dimensionality. For example, under despotism, farmers had to produce; under colonialism, farmers and workers could only produce; and under consumerism, people can only consume. As people’s other dimensions

are left unexplored, they become mechanical and devoid of totality.

A nouveau-riche class has emerged recently—a herd of imitators who consume as much as they can to try and fill their sense of emptiness. Under the influence of the global market economy, the desire to consume has replaced that to possess. Advertising indoctrinates people “to buy, use, and throw away” not only commodities but also human relationships, thus commodifying the human being.

The throw-away culture negates rootedness (sense of belonging), lofty feelings, or love for people and the motherland. It trains people to find satisfaction within the very conditions society imposes upon them. As one of Ibsen’s characters says: “He can do anything he wants to do because he wants only what he can do” (quoted in Fromm 1984: 14). This is the essence of consumerism: it rewards mediocrity and domesticates people to attain its ends.

### **Predicament**

Pakistan’s educational system—education planning, implementation, and methods—is a tool of State indoctrination.

### **Education policies and curriculum planning**

Every new government issues its own education policy irrespective of previous experiences. Normally it is full of unrealistically high promises, leading to faulty planning or no planning at all. For example, the National Education Policy, 1998-2010, envisages the following targets:

- All curriculums (grades 1-12) shall be revamped, making them a systematic whole to be linked to teacher training and textbook reform.
- A new and more logical, demanding, and challenging curriculum shall be developed.

- The National Education Policy, 1998-2010, targets complete transformation of textbook style by
  - providing knowledge that is useful for a developing society,
  - inculcating problem solving to develop independent and critical thinking,
  - creating skills and attitudes relevant to real-life situations, and
  - reorientating textbook writing and production.

While the above concepts are forward-looking, useful, and theoretically sound, they do require commitment and infrastructure for implementation.

The prospects for implementation are not encouraging. A close examination shows that the new curriculum not only ignores the above concepts, but also that it consists of old curriculums—restructured but with the same old concepts and objectives.

### **Textbooks**

The curriculums are developed by the Federal Ministry of Education and sent to the Provincial Textbook Boards to guide textbook development. The boards then send the manuscripts to the Ministry of Education for authentication, including checking for any material against Islam. After complete satisfaction, a no-objection certificate is issued and the books are published. Changes cannot be made without government approval.

The Ministry of Education not only controls the production of textbooks but has also started to enlarge its functions of providing curriculums and policy directives to schools and preparing manuscripts.

Although the textbooks are prepared based on the curriculum, they are not developed as an essential part of curriculum planning and implementation. They emphasize curriculum content while ignoring other domains such as

cognition development. The books have the following characteristics:

- They amass information without considering the reader's age or learning level. There is no difference in presentation among books in classes 4 and 8, for example, making the material highly abstract and uninteresting. (See Annex 1.)
- State doctrines are repeated in various textbooks across grades. More than 40% of the material overlaps or is repeated, and is abstract, rhetorical, dogmatic, and boring. (See sample chart in Annex 2.)

#### Women in textbooks

Stereotypical images of femininity in textbooks include the following:

- Women should work at home.
- Men should lead the women.
- Women are physically weaker than men.
- Women are intellectually weaker than men.

#### History and historical personalities in textbooks

Textbooks present history in the following ways:

- glorifying Muslim rule in South Asia;
- depicting Muslim rulers as kind to their people and representing Islam, and society as having no caste or religious discrimination;
- neglecting cause-and-effect relationships while depicting historical facts, leading to mythification or propaganda;
- inculcating hatred for other communities, fostering narrow-mindedness, sectarianism, and intolerance;
- glossing over defeat and embarrassment in history with theories of conspiracy, myth-making, etc.;
- making differences of opinion and lifestyle the basis for hatred and animosity;
- promoting national identity and pride based upon hatred of others, requiring an enemy to affirm national identity; and

- portraying historical personalities as so abstract and larger-than-life that children cannot relate to them.

#### Teaching

Teaching by using textbooks is the weakest part of curriculum implementation. The teaching of science, social studies, and Islamiyat textbooks is ignored in the schools. Instead, pupils are encouraged to buy "helping" books and required to cram for examinations. The teaching of Urdu and English, if done at all, is confined to reading and reciting the meaning of difficult words, etc. The classroom is highly authoritarian and punishment routine.

The public educational system has collapsed. In the past 10 years, private tuition centers have emerged. Teachers at government schools coerce their students to gain admission to them, not to help them learn but to help the centers earn money.

Private English-medium schools cater to upper-middle- and upper-class families. Students are prepared for the Cambridge-style ordinary- and advanced-level examinations and generally go to England or the US for further studies.

Poor copies of the English-medium schools have opened in villages, towns, and big cities for middle- and lower-middle-class children whose families wish to differentiate themselves from the lower classes.

#### Monitoring and assessment

Curriculum planning and implementation along with other prerequisites are not conceived as an integrated system. Curriculums are not, therefore, monitored or assessed. A trial-and-error process sometimes corrects mistakes but usually too late. For example, English language was introduced in class 1 in 1992, and one class was to be added every year after that. The introduction of English at the primary level was to be completed by 1999.

By then, however, existing English teachers had not been trained nor new English teachers recruited.

Arabic was introduced from grades 6 to 9 or 10 as a compulsory subject in order to help students better understand the teachings of Islam. Instead, the additional subject overburdens the students.

### Hope

*Every habit can be transformed.*

*Substituted by a counter habit.*

*He who can be educated can be re-educated.*

*A child becomes what his education is.*

—Luis Alberto Machado (1980: 16)

Erich Fromm (1984: 46) characterizes the agenda for change as including the following:

- belief in the unity of the human race, and that there is nothing human that is not found in every one of us;
- emphasis on human dignity;
- emphasis on human capacity to develop and perfect himself; and
- emphasis on reason, objectivity, and peace.

Paolo Freire (1972: 9) states: “Education is either for domestication or for freedom. Although it is customarily conceived as a conditioning process, education can equally be an instrument for de-conditioning.” The objectives of education, therefore, should include the following:

- Help develop the critical powers of the individual.
- Provide a basis for the creative expression of the individual’s personality.
- Nurture free human beings who will be immune to manipulation and to the exploitation of their suggestibility for the pleasure and profit of others.
- Define knowledge not as a mere mass of information but as the rational means of understanding the underlying forces that determine material and human processes.

- Define education as embracing not only reason but also the arts, as producing not only intelligent spectators but well-equipped participants, not only in the production of material goods but in the enjoyment of life (Fromm 1984: 79).
- Define cultural activities as not only providing intellectual education but also as allowing all forms of artistic expression (through music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture, architecture etc.) (Fromm 1984: 81).

### Short-term plans

Pictures depicting the following may be prepared and included in the existing instructional materials:

- sharing of food, enjoyment, opinions, responsibilities, common interests, and difficult circumstances;
- thinking skills such as deduction, classifying, finding patterns, finding analogies, sequencing, tracking, predicting outcome, making inferences, and problem solving; and
- library skills, including learning through reading.

### Training of imagination

Imagination is a basic requirement for thinking. The greater the power of imagination, the greater the power to think and find solutions. Training the imagination should be a basic prerequisite for quality education. Imagination can be trained by introducing children to literature.

### Long-term plan

The following conceptual framework (Table 1) should be the basis of the development of education. It covers all the theoretical ingredients required for the development of a humane society as well as of individuals with a high

**TABLE 1. Targets, methods, and curriculums**

<i>Target/Methods</i>	<i>Present curriculums</i>	<i>Future curriculums</i>
Learning	Cramming Passivity Dependence on teacher/textbook Fact/Information based	Understanding/Questioning Critical thinking/Creative mind Self-discovery (intellectual autonomy) Skill/Attitude oriented
Teaching	Authoritative	Two-way (collaborative)
Personality	Humiliation Punishment Self-centeredness Sentimentality Irrationality	Self-actualization  Sharing Emotional stability Rational
Society	Xenophobic Dehumanized	Open Humanistic

Source: Curriculum 2000, prepared by Book Group, Karachi.

level of critical thinking, stable emotions, and fellow feeling.

This concept is ambitious and requires a lot of planning, research, and material development in the following spheres:

*Enlistment of learning / Attainment targets*

If we had a list and description of types and range of performance that pupils of a particular grade may characteristically demonstrate, then the whole system of education would automatically be reformed as envisaged in the above module.

Listing attainment targets requires research at the grass-roots level, keeping in view rural, urban, and economic stratification. After making the list for various subjects for various grades, the learning process would not only become target oriented but also transform the teaching and examination system.

*Achievement modules and preparation of instructional materials*

To attain the above targets, the following should be developed:

- source material for pupils (textbooks and supplementary reading material);
- instructional material for teachers;
- classroom material (exercise/workbooks); and
- assessment of material.

*Teacher training*

Under the above scheme the role of the teacher has to be redefined and a comprehensive training program chalked out and implemented gradually from key trainers to the grass-roots level.

*Community participation*

The above scheme requires close participation of parents and other stakeholders to achieve maximum results. A reorientation program for parents has to be designed and implemented.

*Pilot project*

A pilot project based on the above concepts and modules should be prepared and imple-

mented in selected schools to assess bottlenecks and difficulties.

#### *Monitoring and assessment*

After the implementation of the curriculum plan, periodical monitoring and assessment should be carried out to remove bottlenecks and take corrective measures.

The implementation of the above concepts would be a vital step in the right direction. But it is not an easy job. It requires, first of all,

political will, then in-depth studies and meticulous implementation. Through this model we can achieve quality education and make our society a humanist one.

#### **References**

- Fromm, Erich. *Disobedience and Other Essays*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.
- Machado, Luis Alberto. *The Right to Be Intelligent*. Trans. Mark C. Wheeler. Oxford and New York: Pergamon Press, 1980.

## ANNEX 1

### Abstract Textual Material in Textbooks

IF MATERIAL is not presented in a way appropriate to the learning level of the target group, it will be abstract and irrelevant.

Textbooks today have the following characteristics:

- Textual matter is neither graded nor presented to meet the learning requirements of pupils.
- Information and facts are collected without considering the learning level of students.
- The material is highly uninteresting because it is unrelated to pupils' existing knowledge.

Some examples of text are the following:

All material things are made of small particles. These particles are so small that we cannot see them. Some things are made of one type of particle such as sulphur. The smallest part of any particle that cannot be further divided is called the atom. (Translated from *Science-V*, Punjab Textbook Board, page 38.)

In this short paragraph, nine key concepts are given which need separate elaboration with illustrations, etc.

A similar kind of presentation is found in all but few science books.

The sages say that time is more precious than gold, silver, diamonds, or gems. Rather, time is life. The one who uses it correctly, succeeds. This precious wealth is given by nature to everyone equally. The people who use this wealth correctly and at the right time will enjoy physical pleasure and spiritual happiness. (Translated from *Urdu-VI*, N.W.F.P Textbook Board, page 103.)

After reading the above abstract paragraph, would a child learn time management?

The nature of man is to strive to discover new things. He suffers in the process, but his curiosity and passion help him to remove all obstacles and to face all difficulties. Deep seas and high mountains cannot weaken his determination. Every failure gives him new courage and he continues his journey with commitment and ultimately succeeds. He has discovered each and every corner of the world and these days he is busy in opening up the secrets of the universe. (Translated from *Social Studies-VIII*, Sindh Textbook Board, page 72.)

The purpose of the above paragraph is to let the pupils understand the concept of discovery in human history. Is it successful?

## ANNEX 2

### Textual Material Overlap in Textbooks

No.	Book	<i>Total number of lessons</i>	<i>Lessons on patriotism/ Ideology of Pakistan</i>	<i>Lessons on theology/ Morality</i>
1	Mairi Kitab I (Based on the Integrated Curriculum, published by the Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore)	25	2	13
2	Mairi Kitab II (Based on the Integrated Curriculum, published by the Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore)	44	5	19
3	Mairi Kitab III (Based on the Integrated Curriculum, published by the Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore)	50	5	23
4	Urdu Ki Chothi Kitab (Punjab)	44	7	13
5	Urdu Ki Panchvi Kitab (Punjab)	34	5	13
6	Urdu Ki Teesri Kitab (Sindh)	42	5	20
7	Urdu Ki Panchvi Kitab (Sindh)	39	5	24
8	Urdu V (Balochistan)	38	8	19
9	Darsi Kitab III	33	4	22

A similar overlap is found in the textbooks for social studies, Islamiat, English, Arabic, and Persian (3-8).