**A Fatal Blow to Higher Education (Part V)**

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February 23, 2022

What we have so far identified as the salient factors leading to the steep decline in the education standards in Sindh are the feudal mindset; the clientele political system introduced and perpetuated by the ruling party; the widespread nepotism and the recruitment of incompetent teachers under the patron-client system; the unlawful appointments and shoulder promotions; the corruption and corrupt practices; the ghost schools, widespread absenteeism, and habitual absconding; the lack of performance-based evaluation of teachers; the absence of regular training and capacity building; the dilapidated school buildings and occupation of buildings by influential; the ineffective accountability; the mismanagement of funds; abject poverty and no financial support system at the primary and secondary level for poor children.

If we survey other departments, we would not be surprised to find almost these same factors bringing down their performance. However, the output of all these departments depends on the quality, capacity, skill, and competence of the manpower spawned by the education system. The state has to realise its fundamental responsibility to meet the basic needs of its citizens, particularly education, as enjoined by the Constitution through federal or provincial executives.

We have a limited democracy that has not been expanded to empower the people at the grass-root level; to have transparent governance focusing on the basic needs of the people; rule of law, justice, and equity within the societal structures and promotion of modern education and technology to uplift the dispossessed from the dreary social and economic subjugation. We are guilty of the vulgar crime of constitutional transgressions and moral aberrations as a nation. This democracy we boast of untiringly does not absolve us of this vulgarity.

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After this small digression needed to have a brief view of the national affairs that are more dismaying than what we have in the provinces, we revert to our original theme of education. The importance of education in nation-building could hardly be overemphasized. Without strong foundational support fortified with education, we cannot raise the edifice of a healthy and conscious nation. All the developed countries laid more emphasis on the dissemination of primary and secondary education with the twin purpose of expanding literacy and grooming good students for their higher educational institutions. Their educational system goes up like a pyramid with wide space at the bottom than the summit.

We also started building our education system in the same way with more emphasis on primary and secondary education. Primary education was compulsory and the teachers had the privilege of visiting villages in their jurisdiction and reporting for the prosecution of the deviant parents deliberately involved in keeping their children away from school. Teachers were polite, well dressed, and well versed in their subjects; imbued with a manifest parental affection and hence commanded respect among the students and their parents.

The primary schools were supervised by an Inspector of Schools from the Division who had on his fingertips all the information about the schools, teachers, and students in his jurisdiction. He inspected our school in a far-flung village twice a year. There were no layers of incompetent and inertia-ridden administrative and controlling offices as witnessed today.

As a healthy practice, children irrespective of their family, cast and creed shared the duty of cleaning the school premises and general cleanliness campaigns in the village or town, fetching water if the school didn’t have its water supply or water hand pump, tree plantation. Physical training was compulsory. Games like football and volleyball were played with the participation of teachers who were from the other regions lived within the premises of the school in single accommodations or the town. Our science and math teachers hailed from Punjab and were good volleyball players. Teachers charged no money for helping students to review their courses before the Board Examinations. The system remained well functional in such an environmentally and psychologically healthy atmosphere until the mid1970s.

The chaos we witness in education today is the cumulative consequences of the clientele political system and the corruption and corrupt practices it gradually stirred in the society since 1985 when each Member of the National Assembly, elected on a non-party basis, was given a quota of hundreds of teachers for an appointment. Jam Sadiq Ali repeated this odious practice. The subsequent administrations did not lag in promoting this spoil system further compounding the affliction to the education.

Notwithstanding the gravity of the situation, we, however, can make earnest and a seamless whole of government efforts to reform it. To start with, the government should impose emergency in education for ten years declaring primary education as compulsory and suspending teachers’ unions; redefine the qualifications of teachers from primary to secondary level and make merit the sole criteria for all appointments; dispense with the services of the teachers lacking the prescribed qualifications, known absentees and habitual absconders; review the prospects of promotion and career of primary and high school teachers and Headmasters, and, as a rule, make all appointments in grade 17 and above through Sindh Public Service Commission.

All postings and promotions may be merit-based and linked with performance evaluation. The District Education and Sub Divisional Officers may be selected on merit for a result-oriented and secure term of three years. They should be made responsible for the transfer of teachers, their performance evaluation, and the upkeep of infrastructural facilities including buildings, playgrounds, and facilities including toilets, furniture, electricity, and four walls. They should send quarterly reports regularly to a higher authority. There should be zero tolerance for absenteeism and absconding, corruption, corrupt practices, corrupt elements, and copy culture in the Board Examinations.

We should create awareness in parents and students about the long-term damages of cheating in Board Examinations. As in other countries, we also should form parent-teachers committees or Boards of Governors for periodical review of teaching and progress of students in primary and high schools. We should have periodical training programs to build the capacity of teachers with modern and technology-based teaching methods.

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