

Different systems for goose and gander

By Peerzada Salman

Edm-Gron

TO educate is to bring up and instruct. The act is also defined as strengthening of the powers of body and mind. Many scholars liken education to culture. Sad as it may sound Pakistan is a country that cannot boast of, among several other things, its educational system. In fact, overlooking the importance of this vital aspect of life since the country's inception is the solitary reason that today we find ourselves caught up in myriads of problems, ranging from bigotry to political buffoonery to mediocrity.

What has compounded the problem is the coexistence of two, if not more, methods of imparting education that run parallel in Pakistan, namely the O' Level and the matriculation setups. According to popular opinion, the former is meant for the privileged class and the latter is for those who can't afford a decent education.

The logical question that rears its head: why can't there be one structure for all and sundry? Why can't what's good for the goose be good for the gander? But perhaps the recent diarchal system in the country (read: the deal in Swat) says it all. However, the coexistence of the O' Level and the matriculation systems is an enigma that can be resolved with a little bit of introspection and debate.

But do the authorities concerned want to resolve it?

Managing Director of Sindh Education Foundation Anita Ghulam Ali says: "You are mistaken if you think that there are only two systems of education that function in Pakistan. Our research has shown that there are no less than 18.

"But definitely the general certificate of education (GCE) system has an edge over the matriculation method of teaching. There are four primary reasons: (1) there is a lot of freedom for students to take any subject that they want to study; (2) the core curriculum of all subjects is a million times better, and books are far better; (3) it gives students the advantage of taking subjects that may not be relevant to any profession but are helpful in understanding life; and (4) it's examinations have credibility.

"As far as the standard of teachers goes, it's simple: better quality books, better teaching staff," says Anita Ghulam Ali.

Urdu poet and critic Sehar Ansari, who has taught at Karachi University, is of a slightly different view. "The O' Level setup is an incomplete one. It doesn't take students forward once they're done with their course, because subsequently they have to study Islamiyat, Urdu and Pakistan Studies to reach the 'equivalent' stage. Yes, I agree those in pursuit of their matriculation degree have to work harder. Here I must add that apart from putting emphasis on Urdu and Pakistan Studies, they need to better their English language skills, for which worthy courses and teachers are a must.

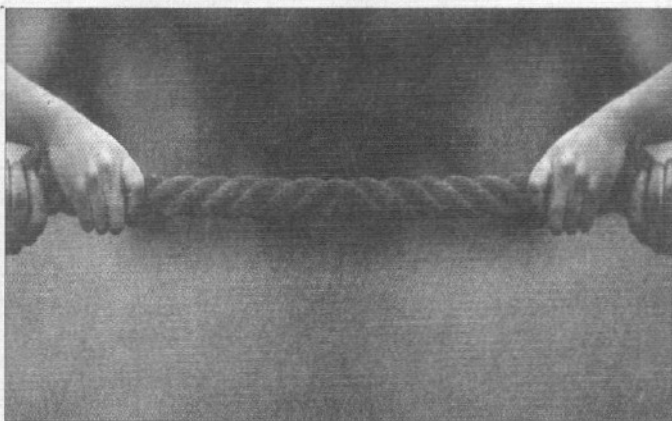
"The O' Level teachers are better equipped and know their job well because they get good salaries and other facilities," says Prof Sehar Ansari.

A principal of a prestigious school believes that there's no comparison. "There's a marked difference between the two. The extent of syllabus that the O' Level covers and the way it educates a child is more evaluative and analytical which develops their thinking faculties, whereas in the matriculation system children become accustomed to rote-learning.

"This is not to suggest that the matriculation methodology is not repairable. It can be improved if we revise its curriculum, which is more than three decades old," she says.

Touching upon the subject of the teaching staff, she says, "Since teachers take it lightly and see their job as a routine thing,

What has compounded the problem is the coexistence of two, if not more, methods of imparting education that run parallel in Pakistan, namely the O' Level and the matriculation setups. According to popular opinion, the former is meant for the privileged class and the latter is for those who can't afford a decent education.



they follow the same old pattern which their predecessors followed. On the other hand, the O' Level teachers need to be on their toes all the time. They are required to be inventive in their style and mannerism, for which seminars and even online teacher training sessions are arranged."

Renowned man of letters Asif Farrukhi says, "I cannot comment on how the education structure should work in the country or how it can be improved, but with respect to the schism between the O' Level and the matriculation systems is concerned I feel in the O' Level setup students get to explore their individuality better as there are many opportunities before them. Whereas in the matriculation system all students are herded with one stick and children seldom get to explore their individual talent.

"Then there's the issue of class disparity. I think that the authorities concerned have made it a point that the matriculation form of schooling is meant for the lesser or underprivileged segment of society, which has its affects on students. As a result the quality of education suffers. The curriculum that is employed for this kind of teaching is rigid and doesn't provide students with enough room to broaden their horizon. For example, the entire burden of the ideology of Pakistan is on Urdu. This is unjust. What it does is that it insulates the thinking faculty of the children who want to learn and they're not able to see the bigger picture and their approach to life becomes myopic," says Asif Farrukhi.

So does it all boil down to social inequality? Is it all about class difference? Why can't a son or daughter of a clerk opt for the GCE mode of schooling? Does this mean that if you don't have money, you can't acquire a reasonable education? Probably that's not how the powers that be think. Education is never on their priority list. Why should that be the case? They have better things to do, like organising, or dealing with, sit-ins and processions. ■