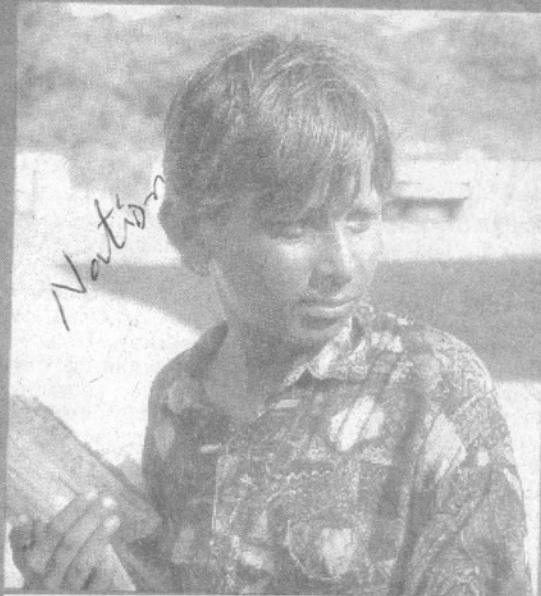


Myron Weiner
Omar Norman

The Child and the State in India and Pakistan



Child Labor and Education Policies
in Comparative Perspective

Lost childhood

Farooq Nasim Bajwa

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Weiner*

**The Child and the State in
India and Pakistan: Child
Labour and Education Policies in
Comparative Perspective**

Myron Weiner and Omar Norman
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It is almost fifty years since the states of India and Pakistan came into being. Although there has undoubtedly been an improvement in some areas, others such as poverty, malnutrition and high rates of infant mortality, have dogged both states. Pakistan in particular has had a consistently high economic growth for decades but as far as the majority of the people in the country are concerned, it has made little difference to their lives. Neither state needs to reinvent the wheel: contemporary and historic examples show that governments have to make education a priority if they are to break the vicious cycle of mass illiteracy and child labour. There have already been studies discussing this issue, notably Omar Norman's previous work *The Political Economy of Pakistan 1947-1988* and Akmal Hussain in *Strategic Issues in Pakistan's Economic Policies*. This book has just made its appearance in Pakistan published by Oxford University Press.

memory and deadens any intellectual curiosity a child might have. The effect of this in Pakistan has been devastating and the thought of millions of matriculates running loose is almost worse than imagining them as being illiterate. It has meant a sharpening of class divisions between those who can afford studying in expensive English medium schools and colleges and those who cannot, condemned either to surviving on their wits or being 'taught' in a government school. To fill this void, another option which is becoming increasingly popular and is also a latent threat to an already unstable environment is the growth of unregulated and unsupervised mosque schools.

The need for quality education on a national scale for any country for many states not even a debatable point. As this book illustrates in the past one hundred years, states like Germany, Japan, Britain, the United States and China have introduced compulsory education and have seen the nations develop from divided and uneducated masses into sophisticated economies, leading the world in science, technology and economic growth. India and Pakistan, along with many other Asian countries which were de-colonised at the end of the Second World War, have been left standing. Pakistan has often been compared to South Korea in the 1950s as they were on par eco-

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This work was originally only on the child and state in India by Professor Myron Weiner of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology but Dr Omar Noman at Oxford University has added two chapters specifically on Pakistan. The book is a detailed study on the relation of child labour and compulsory education. The book is well researched and timely as illiteracy in Pakistan is at last recognised as one of the most serious problems facing the state. As Omar Noman points out, successive governments in Pakistan have in the last decade virtually admitted their inability and unwillingness to take on the cause of compulsory primary education for the population. Therefore, allowing the emergence of non-governmental educational organisations and private bodies who are trying to fill the vacuum. At an official literacy rate of 26 per cent, Pakistan has the dubious distinction of having one of the world's worst literacy rates. (The issue of child labour in Pakistan is also currently in the news thanks to the murder of Iqbal Masih, a twelve year old boy, who recently received an award from an American organisation after recounting how he had apparently been forced to work as a bonded labourer in a carpet factory since early childhood.

Weiner makes a number of observations on the reasons behind the failure of India to match China in eradicating illiteracy and much to its shame, the world's largest democracy is also home to the world's largest number of illiterates. Most notably, the Chinese made primary education compulsory from 1949. This meant that China's literacy rate jumped from 20 per cent in that year to 93 per cent in 1982. Mass adult literacy campaigns were also launched. India's literacy rate is still less than 50 per cent.

The point made by the authors is that the large numbers of children working in both India and Pakistan means that even when an option of sending a child to school is available, poor parents are reluctant to lose a supplementary wage. Although it is understandable for economically deprived families and communities to send their children to work as they need the money and have little faith in the education received as being of any real use, it is astonishing that successive governments in India and Pakistan have not made any serious and concerted attempt to stamp out illiteracy. By not doing so both countries have suffered enormously in terms of high infant mortality rates, a high population growth rate, low industrial and agricultural productivity and accentuated divisions within societies that needed them least.

One of the lesser known facts brought to light by Weiner is that in both India and Pakistan, there are laws dating back to British times which enable local authorities to pass a bill making primary education compulsory. As yet there is no bill from either government which makes primary education compulsory in spite of many requests and promises to do so.

One crucial aspect of primary education which was dealt with by Weiner in his discussion on Indian education, which is obviously equally true for Pakistan, is the kind of education that the children actually receive once they do go to school. In both countries there has been a mental block about updating or modernising the education system. What may have passed for an education in pre-partition times simply does not equip a child to do anything other than to be able to read. It encourages learning by

rea in the 1950s as they were on par economically and India with China. It does not need a historian or an economist to see that South Korea and China have left India and Pakistan far behind, both in terms of economic development and literacy, and it does not need a genius to guess that the two things may be linked. (It similarly does not need a great deal of perception to see that there is an unholy alliance between mass illiteracy and child labour. In countries where children do not go to school, there will be the pitiful sight of underpaid and overworked children working as members of a labour force and even dominating certain areas of work such as match factories in India and carpet making in Pakistan.

The answer obviously lies in a complete overhaul of the education system and a re-definition of educational goals. As Weiner and Noman point out, many people in both India and Pakistan are aware of the need to be literate but also question the utility of a government school in providing education. As Noman's figures show, most children work mainly to learn a skill which they feel will be useful to them in their working life. As children are invariably paid less than adults, the exploitation of child labour at minimal rates will continue for as long as schools teach nothing useful in an atmosphere un conducive to teaching. As Weiner graphically shows, states have always had first to invest in education before results in terms of increased social awareness and a greater level of productivity was apparent thanks to a better educated work force. The other interesting statistic was that it does cost that much more to even provide a reasonable education. Countries like Sri Lanka and China with Gross Domestic Product per head equal to one even less than that of India or Pakistan, have managed to achieve impressive literacy rates.

There is a growing awareness in Pakistan that something must be done. The present government has allocated billions of rupees in the next few years under a social action programme but there have been similar schemes from previous governments which have got lost or side-tracked in the maze of bureaucratic inertia and corruption. This work shows how the many of the problems are inter-related: there will continue to be child labour as long as children and parents have no incentive, reason or compulsion to be educated. As long as the government does not provide the lead in making it compulsory for children to attend, the majority will not. This gives official tacit support to the idea of child labour and as long as a work force is not educated, it is impossible for a country to industrialise and to translate economic growth into solid technological and industrial achievements. The lessons of Sri Lanka and South India must also be noted: that although these regions are poor, they have still left other parts of the sub-continent, particularly Pakistan, far behind. Meanwhile, for India and Pakistan, the cost of their negligence in allowing children to be exploited as a source of cheap labour is horrendous. However, fashionable or tempting it may be for governments to wash their hands of the expense and trouble of providing basic social welfare, it is the ultimate responsibility of the state to ensure protection of and education to, its children. (The longer it takes the Governments of Pakistan and India to realise and appreciate this fact, the worse an already appalling situation will inevitably get.