

## **SOCIAL TRANSITION AND EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN**

by

**Dr. Muhammad Arif Zia\***

### **Introduction**

The closed social systems normally change with the spread of education and after having contact with the developed societies. Electronic media wherever available helps to bring over this change more rapidly. But, to understand the message of the media and feel its influence, certain level of education is a pre-requisite.

### **Education and Social Transition in Pakistan**

At present Pakistan is under the increasing pressure of rapid population expansion growing at the annual rate of 3.1 percent. Presently, it has a population of 117.32 million which is expected to touch the figure of 150 million upto the year 2000 (Economic Survey 1991-92).

About 71 percent of the population live in 45000 villages scattered in the rural area. Most of the earning people are small farmers, tenants, share croppers, landless labourers and artisans serving the rural farmers on annual payment basis. The literacy rate which is 34.9 (estimated 1992) percent for the overall population of the country, slides down to 17.4 percent for the total rural area and 7.4 percent for rural females. The literacy rate among the agricultural workers is only 10.5 percent (Population census 1981). This enormous illiteracy of the agriculture sector has resulted in low agricultural output/yield per hectare. As a sequel to this situation, this sector contributes only 25 percent (Economic Survey 1991-92) to GDP against 71 percent of population directly or indirectly involved in agriculture.

---

\*The writer is presently working as Associate Professor in Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad.

## **Present Social Composition**

Pakistan has a highly stratified society which combined with social class system makes the social

structure quite complicated. No doubt per capita income has risen upto Rs.7000/- (US \$ 300), but the existing inequalities do not allow an equal share of benefits to the poor. Social stratification, caste system and in-equal income distribution all seem more deeply entrenched in the rural sector. Occupational diversification is also to the minimum and the life is characterised by the predominance of the agricultural activities. Total population of working age i.e. 10 years and above is estimated at 78.25 million (Pakistan Economic Survey 1991-92), and it is increasing at the rate of 3.1 percent per annum. In contrast to this huge working population, employed labour force is limited to only 33.82 million i.e. less than 45 percent (Economic Survey 1991-92). The agriculture sector at present employs 16.52 million persons or 49.00 percent of the actual labour force out of which about 14 million are illiterate.

There is a wide disparity in the number of people working on various farm sizes and thus crucially affecting their income levels. About 51 percent of the farms are under 3.00 acres and they cover only 17 percent of the cultivated land. Nine percent of the farms are above 20 acres, but they cover 36 percent of the area (Economic Survey 1991-92).

About 40 to 50 percent of the rural population consists of landless people who work as share croppers, tenants and labourers. The centuries old domination of land owners has practically made the working class a kind of inferior race. In many cases it appears as they are some kind of sub-human creature evolved to serve the landed class. They have right neither to construct a house nor purchase as small a piece of land as 5 meter square to erect a hut for the family. They have been serving the landed group throughout the centuries without wages or payment in cash. However, they are allowed a specific quantity of food grains in cropping season.

But the situation is not the same in urban areas. Class distinctions which were predominant in the urban localities, began diminishing with rising level of education. To-day semi-rural communities of more than 5000 population have, to some extent, got rid of discrimination between man and man due to land and birth.

Like all developing countries, Pakistan has also witnessed the impact of green revolution and technological changes. A study conducted by the Punjab Economic Research Institute in September, 1983 shows that the landless people have, at last, started coming out of the web of landed group domination. Structural changes taking places with the advent of farm mechanization have also given them a new hope of life. It is observed that the landless class has undergone considerable changes in the work pattern, and there has been a shift from traditional to commercial occupations. This tendency was particularly true for the skilled artisans in irrigated regions of the Punjab. It is further observed that the income earned by labour unit employed was the lowest for agriculture and the highest for non-farm jobs and self-operated business.

This is mainly due to the push factor operating in the rural economy of the country. On the one hand there is abundance of labour force which with the advent of agricultural technology and mechanized cropping has become redundant and need to be absorbed in other sectors and on the other this un-skilled labour force is also multiplying at the rate of 3 percent every year. The rural sector provides in-adequate employment opportunities which is evident from the duration of work hours done and income/output realized. The subsistent farmers, landless tenants, casual workers and even village artisans and other self-employed individual work for fewer hours than they are able and willing to perform. Studies indicate that on the average the work performed hardly exceeds 20-30 hours a week. This has resulted in low level of wages offered to rural workers. According to one study the price of labour in the rural sector is approximately one half of the market price.

Parallel to this phenomenon of the 'push' sector, the pull is also very weak and approximately non-existent. This makes them enjoy unwanted leisure. Despite zero marginal productivity, there is negligible migration. The work sharing milieu of the non-agriculture sector and absence of any productive employment opportunities in the rest of the economy does not allow the rural labour force to move outside.

### **New Impacts**

Compelling push in the traditional sector has, of course, made people think of new trades and occupations emerging with the advent of new technology in both rural and urban areas. This stir of change is the outgrowth of a complex of factors including desire for better education, better medical facilities and reformed pattern of life.

As already pointed out traditional societies are changed and transformed either by education or by a close contact with the outside world. In today's rural Pakistan both these factors are operating. Education is infiltrating slowly deep in the traditional rural life. Accelerating pace of development especially in communication and transport sectors is bringing remote rural areas close to the urban civic centres. Secondary school and college education on the one hand moulding people's attitude towards tradition, and on the other increasingly realizing the need for basic amenities to be provided in remote rural areas. There is increasing demand for more educational facilities and medical services for the villages. Now, the villagers in Pakistan also have great expectations about their own future and future of their off springs.

Such remote areas where literacy rate is only 25%, the people aspire better education for their children. In 'Need "Assessment Survey of the Integrated Functional Education Project, Samahni" in responding to question how they would utilize Rs.50,000/- if awarded to them for use in some productive activity, the highest percentage of 48 percent females and 32 percent males favoured educational

facilities for their children. The second choice, of course, was medical facilities for women and children. It was opted by 33 percent females and 21 percent males. The third choice was technical education as it was selected by 19 percent females and 10.1 percent males.

In another similar question how they would use Rs.50,000/- if granted to them for the welfare of their children, the highest rate of responses was again in favour of education (57% females and 42% males). Here the second choice was technical education, which was opted by 24% females and 21% males. People increasingly becoming aware of the loss they have borne for ignoring education. In the same survey giving causes of prevalent illiteracy, most of them thought that it was due to overwhelming poverty which prevented people from going to school. The second major cause was the unpopularity of education.

It seems that like almost all other fashions education and many other innovative concepts and practices become popular and gradually, just as a fashion, gain ground in a social set up. This can be confirmed by the existence of chunks/groups of countries located close to each other, having very low or very high literacy rate, for example, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Mauritania on one side with very low literacy rate, and Malaysia, Thailand, Burma, Philippines on the other side with very high literacy rate. It seems either closely located countries learn from each other's experiences or get motivated by the progress of the neighbours and endeavour to compete.

This we also observe in our rural life where farmers as a tradition compete with each other in agricultural product and keeping best breed of cattle. Now they compete in sowing best cotton and wheat varieties.

It has also been observed that in educated families there is more demand for education. In another survey (Role of Education in Rural Development: Zia) of rural villages in Pakistan different significant at 01 level was found among the percentage of children attending school from educated families and from illiterate

families. The difference was more conspicuous among the girls.

With growing impact of forces penetrating into the rural social and economic life, as indicated earlier, there is growing demand for skill training and technical education. Survey conducted in 21 villages of Samahni valley (Need Assessment Survey, Samahni) showed that the villagers desired educational facilities, skill training programmes as sewing, midwifery, poultry farming, first aid, embroidery etc. They also desired melted roads, electricity, tube-wells, agricultural extension services, medical facilities, veterinary hospitals, post offices, schools, and colleges for their villages.

In another survey of 20 villages of federal area Islamabad, conducted by the Ministry of Education, Govt. of Pakistan (A Profile of 20 villages) 87.7 percent out of school youth selected education as their first choice from a list of four preferences. Giving rank order to different choices they awarded 1 to skill training and 2 to literacy. The existing phenomenal situation in respect of increased agricultural productivity, skill training and need for more and more education as already expressed, is the outcome of a complex of factors interacing with the changing socio-economic set up of the country.

### **New Social Struggle**

Despite the existence of landed class and ruling groups endeavouring to safeguard their vested interests, education has helped the people to rise in social status. Birth and caste are slowly leaving ground for education. In urban life, it has already become a reality. But in rural life, a hot struggle is in operation as political leadership and judiciary still skew towards the caste, land and birth and the educated being small in number have really a hard time. They yet do not enjoy freedom of opinion. They do not have rights to purchase land (legally they have equal rights), construct a house and make alliances against the will of the land lords.

Education has opened a way out. As expressed



somewhere else, students from poor families, persuade their suppressed parents for moving to the urban slums as education does not teach them blind supervience of an illiterate, ill-mannered land holder only because he holds a large piece of land and he belongs to a so-called higher caste. (Role of Education in Rural Development, Zia.)

According to a survey the potential migrants to the urban areas are those who stand at the bottom of the rural income hierarchy and have no significant ties to their land. At present the 'pull factor' is not so strong as to absorb large quantities of redundant agricultural labour force, now out of work by the mechanized farming operation. The annual population growth of net internal migration during the inter censal period registered a rate of 5.2 percent for the urban areas as compared to 3 percent for over all population. Out of this 2.2 percent internal migrants only a very small segment succeeds in obtaining jobs in the modern sector of economy. Pressure is also mounting on the avenues of hired services as cottage and small scale industries, construction work, petty business and miscellaneous services (Training Needs for Rural Non-Farming Activities, Naveed Asif).

No doubt illiterate and subsistent farmers are never innovative, but they are gradually being influenced by the progressive group operating close to them. Now, they have started sharing the benefits of green revolution. Wheat yield has risen from 1431 KG per hectare in 76-77 to 1880 KG in 1991-92 (Economic Survey), rice from 1505 KG to 1593 KG, cotton from 233 KG to 734 KG and sugar cane from 37.5 tonnes to 39 tonnes. As a result they are breaking perpetual grip of borrowing from the big land owners. Now they comparatively feel free to express themselves, negotiate, buy and sell. Therefore, they are becoming increasingly independent.

Oil exploration in the Middle East countries opened a new venue of jobs and services for both skilled and non-skilled labour force of this country. Upto mid 1982-83 about 1,80,000 workers were remitting about 3 billion US dollors in foreign exchange. Imports on back visits to

country which include varied items of house hold appliances as washing machines, refrigerators, air-conditioners, TVs, VCR's, tape recorders, cars, tractors and other vehicles are in addition to the cash earnings. The earning emigrants have proved a hard blow for the traditional social system. Beautifully decorated houses, cars and all amenities of the life have fallen to the share of labour class. Many big land owners cannot even imagine these luxuries. That is why a large number of inter-class marriages have taken place. Foreign earnings have created a new group with abundance. Slowly the hold of landed class is decreasing and giving way to new middle level group of educated employees, emigrants and the middle level farmers.

### **Increasing Demand for Education**

In almost all parts of the country, there is increasing demand for education both from adults and children. Motivating factors are easily discernable from the above discussion. Parents working in Western countries are highly influenced by the education system as well as zeal of the people for better education of their children. Areas from where migrants are working in Western countries are more eager to educate their offspring. A conspicuous example is Kashmir where enrolment ratio in respect of boys 5-9 age group is 93 percent against over all Pakistan ratio of 65 percent (June 1989-Pakistan Education Key Indicators - 1990). For lower Secondary schools, this ratio is 42 percent in Kashmir as compared to 31 percent for Pakistan. For Secondary Education, in Kashmir the ratio is 35 percent, but in Pakistan it is 24 percent. Similar differences exist in respect of female education. There is increasing demand for more educational institutions and basic amenities for the area.

The social imbalances created by the inflow of foreign earnings have motivated people-created a kind of envy to have better social status and more income. If they fail in getting visa or job permit they turn to education to be in better position for selection. As already indicated increasing under-employment and bare



unemployment are proving to be a constant pressure for more education. But as the studies indicate the unemployment reaches peak level in matriculates-10 years education (5 percent) and degree holders (4.7) respectively (Ghayur and Hashmi - Educated Unemployed). There is increasing demand for technical, vocational and professional education.

In an opinion survey of 1109 male adults conducted in Bhitshah area of Sindh (Need Assessment Survey, Bhitshah - AIOU) where most of the people are agriculturists, 54 percent of the respondents desired agricultural education, 24.0 sewing which is in much demand both inside and outside the country, 26 percent literacy, 15 percent carpet making, 20 percent radio servicing, 26 percent furniture making and 11 percent typing and electrical fitting.

In another survey of house wives conducted in 1990, 55 percent of the respondents favoured skilled work as the source for increasing income (Social Status of Rural Women - Zia).

The prevalent social milieu and the pressing demand of economic conditions, harnessing the need for such kind of education which is both productive and elevating for the individuals. It is functional in nature and can be put in immediate use at home, office and business. It is useful not only for both male and female but also for rural and urban people. It is equally available to illiterate masses as well as to the highly educated people.

Rapid population expansion has put barriers of merit and other restrictions which create estrangement between the natives of the same country. Formal system of education is limited by the number of seats available, funds (budget allocations) and the disciplines. There is also limitation of regular attendance. For meeting the expanding needs of the people with varied skill requirements a more open system of education is required.

As we witness, we as a nation lack the concept of

service to humanity. Our all business including education are devoid of this basic element. We are easily driven by the evil motives. Private sector can go a long way in serving the pressing educational needs of the people, but as it is already visible, an educational institution will turn up into a business concern. Although it will not possess all desirables but will have all undesirables.

### References

1. Akhtar, Rafique Ed. Pakistan Year Book, Lahore-Karachi, East and West Publishing Company, 1981, pp-567.
2. Allama Iqbal Open University, Need Assessment Survey Report IFE Project, Bhitshah, June 1981, pp-42.
3. Need Assessment Survey Report, IFE Project, Smahni, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad.
4. Asif, Naveed, Training Needs for Rural Non-Farming Activities Both for Men and Women, for upgrading their skills, Better Products, Productivity and Marketing Unpublished Paper.
5. Ghuyur and Hashmi (Eds) Educated Unemployed, Ministry of Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis, Govt. of Pakistan, Islamabad, 1990, pp-162.
6. Matin, Dr. Abdul, Strategy of Employment in Pakistan, Pakistan Manpower Review, Vol.IX, No.1, 1985.
7. Nayami, Yujiro and Rattan, Vernon W., The Green Revolution: Inducement and Distribution, The Pakistan Development Review, Vol.XX III, Spring 1984, No.1 pp-37-63.
8. Pakistan, Govt. of A Profile of 20 Villages in the Islamabad Federal Area, Ministry of Education

Islamabad, November 1981, pp-93.

9. \_\_\_\_\_ Economic Survey 1991-92, Finance Division, Islamabad, pp-278.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ The Sixth Five Year Plan 1983-88, Islamabad, Planning Commission, May 1983, pp-500.
11. Pakistan Manpower Institute Proceedings Report of the National Training Course on Vocational-Guidance and Employment Services for Employment Promotion, Islamabad 1981, pp-20.
12. Zia, Dr. Muhammad Arif, A study of the Role of Education in Rural Development, Institute of Education and Research, Punjab University, Lahore, 1980 (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation) pp-282.
13. \_\_\_\_\_, A Study of Health and Social conditions of Rural Women in District Gujrat, 1990, pp-203.