

PAKISTAN AND THE LEGACY OF  
BRITISH COLONIALISM

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**The Time Educational Supplement**

April 1977

PROF. KHURSHID AHMAD



# Pakistan and the legacy of British colonialism

by Khursid Ahmad

Pakistan is a new old country: new because it appeared on the political map of the world as an independent country only on August 14, 1947; old because although the country was new, it did inherit a long-established tradition with all its strengths, weaknesses and stresses.

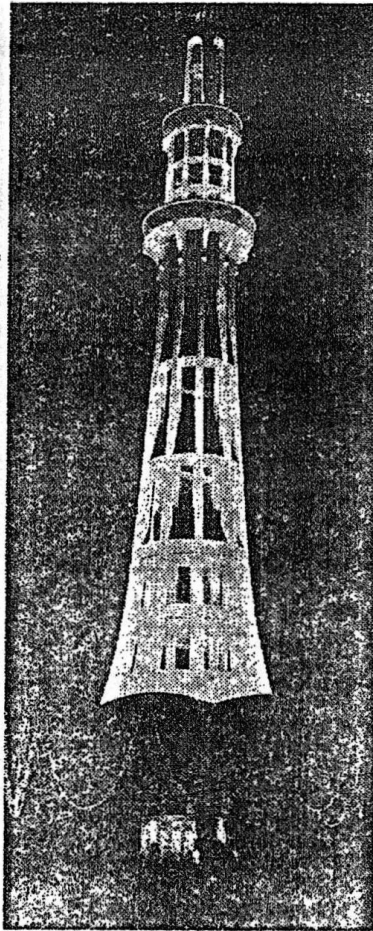
When Britain conquered India its system of education was one of the most advanced in history, with almost universal literacy and specialized institutions catering for different branches and levels of education. "Perhaps there are few communities in the world", wrote a British visitor to India in 1844, "among whom education is more generally diffused than among Mohammedans in India. He who holds an office worth 20 rupees (£1.20) a month gives his sons an education equal to that of a prime minister" (Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, London).

The picture was very different a century later when the British rulers left the sub-continent. The level of illiteracy had risen from zero to 80 per cent. For a total population of 32m in what now constitutes Pakistan there were only two universities, two engineering colleges with an annual output of 123 graduate engineers, two medical colleges with an output of 50 doctors, some 2,500 secondary and 8,500 primary schools.

A highly developed educational system had died a slow death. Only a distorted skeleton of it remained in the form of traditional religious education. On the debris of the old order a new anglicized system of education was developed which neither conformed with the genius of the people nor was able to produce enough educated leadership to meet the needs of the society.

The new education was imparted through the medium of English and was geared to a system of examinations yielding degrees and certificates which acted as visas to employment in government services.

Education had no roots in the culture and values of the people it was supposed to serve. Instead its declared objective, in the words of the author of the colonial educational policy in India, was "to form . . . a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but Englishmen in



The Minar-e-Pakistan, on the site of the passing of the Pakistan Revolution, 1940.

tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay's Minutes of February 2, 1835, in H. Sharp (editor) *Selections from Education Records*, Indian Reprint, Delhi).

Thirty years of education in Pakistan reveal the profile of a nation caught in a tradition established during colonial rule and in supposedly trying to wriggle out of it getting more and more enmeshed into it.

Immediately after the establishment of Pakistan an effort was made to rethink the aims and strategy of education in the context of the ideals and needs of the nation.

The First Educational Conference

held in November, 1947, represents a pioneering effort in this direction. The issue was taken up again and again by a number of commissions and committees. The reports of the Commission on National Education (Sharif Report, 1960), the Commission on Student Problems and Welfare (Hamoodin Rehman Report, 1966) and Educational Policy (1972) tried to grapple with the problem, but the educational system, with resulting tensions and frustrations, remains basically unchanged.

There has, however, been significant quantitative expansion of the system. There are now 11 universities. An Open University is about to start functioning. The number of primary and secondary schools in 1976 stood at 52,562 and 7,976 respectively. The output of graduate engineers has increased to over 1,600 a year. Educational expenditure has increased from 38.2m rupees in 1948-49 to 2,484.2m in 1975-76, about 1.6 per cent of the GNP.

Free primary and secondary education was introduced in 1972, although 53 per cent of the primary school age population is still without schooling. Schooling is available to only 65 per cent of boys and 27 per cent of girls in the 5-9 year age bracket.

In 1972, primary and secondary education was nationalized. This has reduced commercial exploitation of education in certain areas but has led to excessive bureaucratization of education and even a widespread decline in educational standards and discipline.

Although Urdu, the national language, is now being increasingly used as medium of instruction, a coherent policy is still lacking. The damage done to education by ambivalence in this respect has been incalculable.

Education is too much directed towards examinations and too little towards development of intellect, initiative, skills and character. Pass percentages are low and there is widespread wastage through failure and drop-out. Literary bias in education continues and research in institutions of higher education is still at low key.

But the most important problem remains education's unrelatedness to the society and culture of the people. Western knowledge and education remain what one Pakistan educationist has described as "an exotic plant that has in fact never taken real roots in the hearts of the people". The new-old country is still labouring under the shadow of the old while the new is yet to spell out its blossom.