Bhutto's Educational Reform

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Every new aspirant for political office in an election contest is expected to point out the failures of his predecessors in office, the inadequacy of his opponent(s), and to present to the electorate a more or less clearly defined program intended to cure the ills of his constituency. Such a program must be concerned with the basic needs of the electorate, and must demonstrate a realistic assessment of the feasibility of such a program. A candidate for office expects to appeal to the wishes, desires and ambitions of all the electorate, although he knows that not all will necessarily support him.

In an underdeveloped nation, aside from the political and economic issues which almost always hold center stage in a political campaign, perhaps no other item has as much appeal to the masses as that of universal and free education. Pakistan was left with few resources, economic or educational, at the time of independence in 1947, so that the building process for a complete and modern system of education necessarily had to be a slow one.1

Pakistan was founded as a new nation committed to a separate state based on Islamic ideology, but whose system of higher education was largely a replica of the British system, with its concern not with a religious philosophy, but with the arts, letters and sciences of western Europe. Many of the nation's leaders were products of either such institutions in British India or England. (Mr. Bhutto won his B.A. degree at the University of California and took his law training at Oxford. Two of his children are students at Harvard-Radcliffe, while two others are enrolled in the American School in Islamabad.) The ultimate purpose and goal of the educational system established by the British colonial government on the subcontinent was to train a cadre of junior administrators, most of whom could not hope to rise above the level of clerks.

1 When President Ayub Khan came to power in 1958, he proceeded to establish a number of Commissions to study diverse national problems. Among them was the National Commission on Education. In 1968, the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington, D.C., issued a pamphlet titled “Pakistan's Development Decade, 1958-68, Educational Reform,” which proclaimed the educational advances that had been made during Ayub Khan's regime. “Of all the reforms introduced in Pakistan, I feel personally proud of our educational reforms.” It boasted of the achievements of his regime, of which there were some, but played down the failure to achieve the goals set out in the Third Five Year Plan. There were many reasons for the latter, among them the rapid and unabated population increase.
And this system of education prevailed until 1947, when India and Pakistan won their independence.

Since Pakistan was founded on the basis of a religious ideology, but whose system of higher education depends so heavily on western educational experience and outlook, it would almost appear to some observers that in matters of education the nation has developed a schizoid personality. On the one hand the political leaders since independence have felt that they have had to maintain the confidence of the mullahs, yet on the other hand these leaders have also felt the heavy responsibility of leading the nation into the modern world with all its demands of contemporary technology equipped with an inadequate system of education for its people – not the least of which has been one of the highest rates of illiteracy in the world.

The results of the national election in December, 1970, saw not only the emergence of the Pakistan People's Party as the majority political party in West Pakistan, but Mr. Bhutto as the spokesman for the party and its program of reform in the political, economic and social spheres. Following the end of hostilities between Pakistan and India in December, 1971, the PPP was left as the majority party in the west, with the task of rebuilding a nation not only defeated in war, but with considerable self-doubt as to its future. Mr. Bhutto and his newly-named cabinet quickly rallied to the challenge, and within three months of assuming the office of president announced through his Minister of Education, Mr. Abdul Hafeez Pirzada, a short-range and long-range education plan for the nation for the period 1972-1980. This was termed The Education Policy, 1972–1980, and was accompanied by an appendix, Martial Law Regulations, No. 118, signed by Mr. Bhutto in his role as Chief Martial Law Administrator on March 29, 1972 (Policy 1972).

The permanent constitution was passed by the National Assembly on April 10th, 1973 and authenticated by President Bhutto two days later. Parts of two articles (37 and 38), clearly refer to the government’s intentions in the field of education.

"Article 37. The State shall—
(a) promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of backward classes or areas;
(b) remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within the minimum possible period;
(c) make technical and professional education generally available and higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of merit;
(f) enable people of different areas, through education, training, agricultural and industrial development and other methods, to participate fully in all forms of national activities, including employment in the service of Pakistan . . ."

"Article 38. The State shall—
(d) provide basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education and medical relief for all such citizens, irrespective of sex, caste, creed or race, as are permanently or temporarily unable to earn their livelihood on account of infirmity, sickness or unemployment . . ."