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Hired Education: The Commission on National Education and Modernity in Pakistan

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Abstract: The report of the CNE- Commission on National Education, 1959 is one of the most significant policy documents in the history of higher education in Pakistan. It was one of the key referents for the recent reform effort led by the Government- the Task Force on Improvement in Higher Education, 2002, but has been only briefly examined (as a review of Ayub Khan's educational policies by Saigol, 2003, and as a summary of recommendations by Isani and Virk, 2003). The Commission's analyses and recommendations have shaped the institutional nature of higher education in the country and thus offer insights into the defining impulse of building a 'modern' nation, which was its stated object. This paper presents some conclusions drawn from a detailed analysis of the Commission's report, highlighting five features that underpin the report, and therefore the nation-building effort under President General Ayub Khan. These features are further analysed as constituting a tension in the report, and as defining a certain kind of modernity evident in Pakistan to this day. The paper uses these features to present initial thoughts toward conceptualising modernity in Pakistan in the light of postcolonialism and Foucault's theorisation of normalisation.

Keywords: Modernity, Normalisation, Higher Education, Pakistan

The Commission on National Education

As the various nationalist movements, which reflected the natural aspirations of a subject people to be free, gained strength [in the later days of foreign rule], the attitude of the people towards government began to change. This political awakening was followed by a period of unrelenting criticism. Every action of the government, whether intrinsically good or bad, met with a storm of protest. Even those measures that were clearly in the public interest, and there were many, felt the sting of aggressive criticism. Government was viewed as an evil, and non-co-operation became the badge of patriotism... The goal was independence, the tactics were negativism, and all our attitudes and actions were inspired by the end to be achieved and given form by the means we employed... We did not realise then [after independence] that the attitudes and habits of a hundred years cannot be altered by the scratch of a pen on a document of State... One by one we witnessed the reappearance of the old attitudes of passivity, indiscipline, opportunism and regionalism.

Commission on National Education, 1959¹

THE COMMISSION ON National Education (CNE) was inaugurated by President General Ayub Khan in January, 1959 to review the existing educational system. The Commission of 11 members, chaired by S. M. Sharif, delivered its landmark report of 360 closely typed pages to the President in Karachi on August 26, 1959, following visits, interviews and meetings across the nation. The Sharif Commission report is widely regarded as one of the most exhaustive and dedicated efforts at educational reform in the country, being cited by the most recent concerted effort at national reform of higher education by the Task Force in early 2002, and as the 'Magna Carta of Pakistan's educational system'.² There is no doubt that 'the effects of the Ayub era educational policy have persisted beyond his time, and are discernible in contemporary educational discourse in Pakistan'.³

Of relevance here, the CNE emphasised the importance of higher education, making it the first and longest of 27 long chapters, while including references to the importance of a strong base of higher education throughout other areas, including adult

¹ Government of Pakistan (1959) *Report of the Commission on National Education*: 5-6. Available for reference at the library of the National College of Arts, Lahore.

² Saigol, Robina, 2003. *Becoming a Modern Nation: Educational Discourse in the Early Years of Ayub Khan*. Islamabad: COSS: pg 1. See also a brief comment on a summary of the recommendations of the National Commission in Isani, U.A.G & M. Latif Virk, 2003. *Higher Education in Pakistan: A Historical and Futuristic Perspective*. Islamabad: National Book Foundation.

³ Saigol (2003, *ibid*: 2).



education, pedagogy, and the arts and cultural heritage.

The Sharif Commission was tasked by the President to address 'the need for a reorganization and re-orientation of the existing educational system so as to evolve a national system which would better reflect our spiritual, moral and cultural values... [and] meet the challenge of the growing needs of the nation by assisting development. Above all, he [President Ayub Khan] said, our educational system should aim at character building and the pursuit of quality as well as at inculcating a sense of the dignity of labour' (CNE, 1959: 1). In a revealing introduction to its report, the Commission attempted to produce an analysis and set of recommendations that would ensure that the educational system became 'consistent with the country's self-image; that it should be, in form and content, consistent with the hopes and aspirations the country holds for itself' and should be inextricably linked with the immediate project of 'nation-building' (pg. 5).

The report begins with a twin problem of colonial legacy in education and the failure of the nation to lead its own process of self-determination following independence. It notes, 'There was no shift in the attitude of many governmental workers as we moved from foreign rule to independent status' (pg. 7). To redress this, the Commission contextualised its recommendations with the overall need for people to 'revise their concept of Government and their relationship to it' with a 'private sense of public duty,' and thence to view 'education as a public investment in economic development' as well as a means to 'cultivate this sense of unity and nationhood' (pgs. 8, 11). Of prime importance in this respect was an emphasis on 'character building aspect of education' (pg. 12), integrity, and the need to train leadership with 'imagination, high professional ability and a determination to use local resources and not remain dependent on the skills and materials imported from outside' (pg 12).

It is in this context that the Commission began its exhaustive analysis of higher education and recommendations to make it 'concerned with the formation and development of character as well as with the acquisition of knowledge' (pg 17). While recognising the importance of colleges, the Commission focused on universities as the determinants of higher education through their examinations, affiliations and research. The recommendations for universities focused on actions to be taken by the universities themselves, as well as some at the national policy level. They were largely coherent, consistent and practical, and remained largely unimplemented in spirit. However, the Sharif Commission's representation of higher education remains the determinant

view in Pakistan to-date. This paper develops some of the themes implicit in this representation.

Being-in-Pakistan

Above all, the report situated higher education firmly and inextricably within society. This grounding, or place-ment, is in stark contrast to subsequent representations of higher education in a relatively vacuous, culturally neutral space of excellence: 'We recognize that if the universities of Pakistan are not to become institutions isolated from the daily life of our society, if they are to be looked to with confidence, and if they are fully to exercise their influence in the development of a progressive nation, they must consciously adopt measures to bring themselves into touch with the people around them' (pg 52).

Four levels of this being-in the world stand out throughout the section on higher education. *First*, the analysis and the recommendations are suffused with a driving ethic of total dedication to the urgent task of nation-building. The personal pursuits of teaching and learning are related directly to the development of the nation, for example: '[the educational system] must give scope for the training of a leadership group and at the same time provide for the development of all the vocational abilities needed for the creation of a progressive and democratic society' (pg 10), or 'We lay stress on the necessity to develop an educational programme at the different levels which will cultivate this sense of unity and nationhood' (pg 11). In some cases this is directed at socio-economic progress, noting 'the fundamental role that education must play in the programmes of social and economic improvement,' (pg 9) and at others towards citizenship: 'it is through identification with all our problems and all our citizens that we shall find real unity' (pg 11). There are calls to 'share in our national responsibility for higher education' (pg 36). This motivation extends from the institution of the university, to the direction of courses of studies such as the need to change the 'bias' of English teaching 'from the literary to the functional' (pg 22) and the need for 'greater emphasis on the practical problems facing our country' (pg 22) – economics of underdeveloped countries, rural economy, agriculture in humid and arid zones, marine biology, geology with an emphasis on mineralogy, and so on. It encompasses research too, noting that, 'universities should give particular attention to research in fields which affect national development' and: 'the particular needs and attitudes of a country determine its programme of research, and many of the problems with which Pakistan is faced are peculiar to Pakistan. We cannot, therefore, do without our own scholars and research workers if we are fully to realize ourselves as a nation' (pg 28).

Second, the Report is concerned with eradicating the differences and divisions, the ‘communalism’ and ‘provincialism,’ inherent in Pakistan as a legacy of colonisation. The Report lays ‘stress on the necessity to develop an educational programme at the different levels which will cultivate this sense of *unity* and nationhood’ (pg 11) (emphasis added), echoed by President Ayub Khan in his call at the Convocation of Peshawar University in 1962 not to give in to ‘geographical distances, linguistic disparities, local loyalties, cultural pulls...parochial pressures’.⁴ As Saigol (2003) indicates, more than not celebrating the difference the emphasis is clearly on putting them aside, owing allegiance to a common nationality as evidenced by a common state.⁵ Linking education to nation-building and a utopian promise was not a unique effort. Kamuf (1997) recalls a similar linkage in France, following the French revolution, when education was contrasted with instruction.

‘As the word says, education leads; it is directed toward a destination, here the Republic of citizens bound by their duty to protect this future against any return of the past. This bond is secured in memory, the memory of a promise made and a debt owed to the Republic. The calendar is reset from the date of the promise. The extraction of that promise is the principal affair of education and of the educators.’⁶

A thorough analysis of the dynamics of educational policy making and cooption in the nation-building project is yet to be undertaken. However, the problems inherent in this appeal to abstract notions of nation-hood may be pointed to here. The CNE took forward the spirit of the earlier Pakistan Educational Conference (held in November, 1947 in Karachi), which was energised by Pakistan’s founder, Quaid-e-Azam’s call for scientific and technical education in order to build the future economic life of the country, and for instilling in the people the highest sense of ‘honour, integrity, responsibility and selfless service to the nation.’ This call was spread across more sectors than higher education, or even education, as a postscript to the violent political upheaval just ended. However, it established firmly the link between modernisation-by-education and the nation-

state of Pakistan, more abstract because of its novelty. Both the Conference proceedings and the Commission Report a decade later demonstrate this undecidable tension between placing higher education in a grounded context, and at the same time identifying it with a less grounded notion of nation. This tension is commented on later, but is evident in the manner that the Commission extends its placing of higher education being-in the nation to being-in the community, seen as an essential component of the nation. This linking of community to nation as a process of identity construction is commented on in a different context by scholars including Jalal.⁷ It is emphasised here in an un-problematised conflation of ‘collective needs and aspirations of the people of the country’ (pg 10).

Be that as it may, the linking of a community identity to a national identity is perhaps the second most striking, if implicit, feature of the report’s recommendations, given the absence of such policy recommendations since 1959. At the regional level, there is an explicit recognition of Pakistan’s geopolitical realities, as the need for ‘the study of all modern languages, with special attention given to spoken Persian and Arabic. Persian and Arabic have a special significance for us...Going further afield, we must as a nation develop our cultural relations with other countries of Asia and the wider world.’ Within the country, ‘there is the problem of the proper teaching of our own national languages at the university level... Better teaching techniques should be evolved, and more research devoted to them’ (pg 22). This shaping of nation-building by education was emphasised by President Ayub Khan, too, in his call for the system to meet contemporary economic challenges.

But universities are not just exhorted to attune their core functioning to national and community needs. 10 long paragraphs covering three pages outline the importance of the university to ‘bring themselves in touch with the people around them.’ The section is based on the stated goal of avoiding creating ‘a scholar who retreats to an ivory tower and forgets about the world around him, who loses sympathy with ordinary people and who ceases to be a member of the national community’ (pg 52). The students, too, must ‘learn the significance of social service, have the joys of serving their fellow men,

⁴ Saigol (2003, *ibid*: 3).

⁵ Saigol constructs an informative picture of the nation-building project from the Sharif Report as well as statements of Ayub Khan in his early tenure. She points out that the over-riding concern for Ayub Khan was to create a common nation, by eradicating differences as well as by evoking a great, common, lost heritage and invoking a common ‘religious bond’. This religious nationalism ‘from above’ is what has hit Pakistan subsequently and disastrously. At the same time, she notes how education was seen as the key to ‘manufacture’ a modern ‘nation’, by simultaneously positing tradition as negative: ‘In order to become modern citizens, people must relinquish their pre-modern narrower identities and loyalties... and give way to modern consciousness rooted in the ‘rational’ idea of the citizen of the state’ (2003, *ibid*: 10).

⁶ Kamuf, Peggy, 1997. *The Division of Literature, or The University in Deconstruction*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press: 57.

⁷ Jalal, Ayesha, 2001. *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications.

and appreciate the fun and dignity of physical labour' (pg 42). A national programme is proposed for students to undertake mandatory community service themselves and through civic organizations during vacations, for scholars to undertake sociological assessments of their neighbouring communities, and universities to launch adult education and certification courses 'according to the needs, desires, and response of the people for whom they are intended' (pg 53). The purpose of such a program, for the Commission, is not only to ground the university's being in its surrounding reality, but to demonstrate the need for collegiality, proving the advantages of working 'by cooperation rather than by purely individual effort' (pg 54).

This spirit of collegiality constitutes the *third* aspect of the grounding of the university, through the being-in-community of its scholars: 'the essence of higher education is a community of scholarship' (pg 18) and 'at the college and university level students should have the full educational experience of learning with others...[in] the corporate life of a higher educational institution' (pg 25). In particular, the faculty member is perceived as the unit of a collegial atmosphere, 'the teachers must work together as a team and thus set a worthy example for the students' (pg 47). Teachers are to be assigned small groups of students 'who shall be his particular concern and for whom he would serve as counselor and guide' (pg 38), along with close tutorial groups. The university needs to 'provide greatly increased facilities for sports, games, and athletics...[to] help develop not only physical skills but also the team spirit' (pg 38), as well as to provide for a 'student-teacher centre with facilities for relaxation, recreation, cultural and social activities' (pg 39). Great stress is laid on the creation of a wholesome environment, to the extent of universities being located 'outside congested urban areas', as well as on the interpersonal nature of education, such that 'a teacher ceases to be an impersonal and perfunctory routine' (pg 31). The collegiality thus developed links the individual scholar, faculty or student, to the community and to the nation directly through other individuals more than through abstracted concepts. This relationship between the self, the community and the nation (and 'further afield' to the region and the Muslim ummah) is based on personal interaction and relevant to context, all in all a thoroughly cultural experience.

At the *fourth* level the purpose of national policy and decision-making must, in the Commission view, be to enable this grounding to take place. Throughout the report there is a vision of a constellation of self-managing institutions, governed by societal representatives, in close coordination with each other and facilitated by the central government. The Commis-

sion was the first body to recommend the establishment of a University Grants Commission for national planning, not direction, although the authority finally established in 1974 was far different in scope and nature. The most important part of this vision is autonomy of the institution of the university. Universities are recommended to set their own arrangement of terms (pg 32), determine 'their own methods of selecting students' (pg 20), define their own research agenda (pg 26), and define merit for incentivizing teacher performance (pg 34). There is clear recognition that 'a certain degree of flexibility be permitted in the several universities. Conditions in them vary in the matter of enrolment, traditions, and the number of affiliated colleges' (pg 21). Even in the case of administrative structures of universities, there is an appreciation that 'conditions vary in different parts of the country, and therefore it is not possible, nor desirable, to have a uniform pattern of legislation,' and that respective authorities must frame the constitution of each university (pg 47).

This autonomy, combined with the academic freedom granted to teachers (pg 33), is thus predicated on the diversity of human resources, political situation and environmental conditions within the country. In other words, it is predicated on the grounding of each institution in a place, far more than in the neutral space of a centrally directed higher education. The federated structure of the Republic was mirrored in the federated structure of universities, and the entire system was based on an explicit recognition of grounding in local realities and contemporary requirements.

These interlaced features constitute a strong sense of modern identification of a university education with a new nation, with national communities, and with the community of scholars in an environment that enables grounded linkages. The Commission quite evidently sees these as natural and obvious, but also sees the need to stress them in direct relation to the recently concluded period of 'foreign rule.' Thus, as Saigol succinctly puts it, 'Pakistani identity had to be imagined, elaborated and inscribed on the children's minds.'⁸

Normal Education

Underlying the Sharif Report's emphasis on being-in-the-world is its assumption that education is a normalising experience. The Report quotes President Ayub Khan in his speech inaugurating the Commission as saying that 'our educational system should aim at character building and the pursuit of quality as well as at inculcating a sense of the dignity of labour' (pg 1). This call is carried through the report – 'Hence, the emphasis we have laid on the character

⁸ Saigol (*op.cit.*: 33).

building aspect of education' (pg 12) – although the quality of 'character' itself is left unqualified. To some extent the Commission translated this into an overt allegiance to religious norms, evoking Pakistan's existence as the expression of a desire of Muslims to 'govern themselves according to their own special set of values... which emanate from the concept of a universe governed by the principles of truth, justice, and benevolence, where human relationships are based on the ideal of universal brotherhood, and all these are rooted deeply in religious belief' (pg 5).

The mention of attitudes is one indication of how the Commission approaches values, mostly in an obstructionist sense, 'We have become convinced that all of our education problems and, in fact, all of our national problems are inseparably entwined in a web of attitudes and values that is inappropriate to an independent people and incompatible with progress and national development' (pg 10). What is needed, in order to normalise education, then, is that the 'concepts of spiritual and moral values, of nation building, of scientific development, of enlightened citizenship, and of public service should in our view motivate and guide our educational system' (pg 13). In other words, 'higher education must be concerned with the formation and development of character' by 'creating in them [students] proper habits of work... a sense of honesty and fair play in dealing with others' (pg 15). Education, and in particular higher education, is seen as an element in the character development process of students who are at an awkward phase of their lives in which the faculty have a key mentoring role to play. To the extent that, 'If the universities and colleges cannot promote habits of honesty and integrity among their teachers, we fear that they will fail to justify their existence' (pg 24). Other indications as to the character required are spattered throughout the report, such as openness through wide distribution of accepted theses among other universities, and honesty in conducting internal evaluations.

The emphasis on character building is justified in an important section on the physical and psychological stages of students while in college and university. It is related to their 'physical awkwardness' at the age leading to 'self-consciousness, embarrassment, and a desire to withdraw socially', as well as

to mood swings that are 'alternately idealistic and cynical, optimistic and depressed, confident and uncertain, aggressive and docile, courageous and fearful' (pg 37). This strong sense of becoming at the age at which the student is typically in university, is an expression of the fact that education is a process of giving allegiance to the self, as well as to the system that one legitimates by participation (Progler, 2003).

It is self-evident that values are critical in this process of becoming, of identifying with normalcy, and that universities, by virtue of their authoritarian nature centred on power, have a role to play in defining that normalcy. Foreseeing Foucault's arguments in a variety of institutional settings such as the prison⁹ or the clinic¹⁰, the Report clearly sees universities as institutions for normalising the individual at a very sensitive and susceptible stage: 'If ever young men and women are in need of sympathetic understanding, of guidance without domination, it is now... [since] adolescence is an age of hero worship, when young men and women seek models for their own behaviour and character' (pp 37-38).¹¹ This is one reason for the emphasis placed on developing a community of scholars which 'permit close, intimate, and continuous contact between teacher and student' (pg 42). This is also one reason for the strong community and nation-building focus of the Report, as the 'normal' graduate will quite 'normally' help build the nation and combat obstructive attitudes toward progress.

This normative emphasis on education is presented in the same unproblematic manner in other educational initiatives of the State, for example by the Task Force on Higher Education in its vision for higher education thus, 'the transformation of our institutions of higher education... to produce enlightened citizens with strong moral and ethical values that build a tolerant and pluralistic society rooted in the culture of Pakistan'¹². In reviewing the existing Acts of universities, the Task Force also recommended that, 'The university or institute shall be required to strictly comply with the constitutional provisions and law and abide by the social, ethical and cultural ethos and values'.¹³ President General Pervez Musharraf, speaking at a university convocation, said that 'Pakistanis needed to be honest, committed, devoted and dedicated to progress in the world'.¹⁴

⁹ Foucault, Michel, 1979. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage.

¹⁰ Foucault, Michel, 1975. *The Birth of the Clinic*. New York: Vintage.

¹¹ Interestingly, this is the only section in the chapter on higher education where there is an explicit recognition that women are also students. Throughout the remainder of the chapter either masculine (such as 'young men' or 'him') or generic (such as 'student' or 'teacher') referents are used (quite possibly consonant with the practice then in vogue); it is only in normalising that the presence of women is acknowledged specifically.

¹² Government of Pakistan, 2002. *Challenges and Opportunities – Report of the Task Force on Improvement in Higher Education*. Islamabad: GoP: 21.

¹³ Government of Pakistan (2003, *ibid*: 57)

¹⁴ Daily Times, May 15, 2006, pg A4.

The call for character echoes a long-standing debate in British India on the inclusion of morality in Western education, particularly at the higher levels and in English. Syed Mahmood – Sir Syed Ahmed Khan’s son and Trustee and honorary Joint Secretary of the MAO College, Aligarh – followed a discussion on the introduction of teaching in morality in the early 1880s.¹⁵ The report of the Indian Education Commission of 1882 decided that ‘(8)... an attempt be made to prepare a moral text-book, based upon the fundamental principles of natural religion....[and] (9) That the Principal or one of the Professors, in each Government and Aided College, deliver to each of the College Classes, in every Session, a series of lectures on the duties of a man and a citizen’. But Mahmood also gives space to a vociferous dissenting voice from one member of the Commission, (Judge of Bombay High Court) Mr. Kashinath Trimbuk Telang, C.I.E. Possibly due to this well articulated dissent, the ‘scanty support from the Local Governments’, and the difficulty on deciding on a book that is ‘sufficiently vague and colourless, to be accepted by Christians, Mahomedans and Hindus’ the British Government decided to postpone the proposal. However, the succeeding Secretary of State for India, Lord Cross, requested the Government of India in 1887 to prepare such a book notwithstanding. The ensuing debate resulted in a decision in 1889 to drop the idea as ‘the end in view would not be attained by prescribing for use in colleges and schools a treatise on ethics, or a book of didactic instruction in the rules and principles of conduct’.¹⁶

The arguments at work, both for and against the textbook (and in subsequent British Indian Policies in 1904 and 1913, below), were predicated on the acceptance that moral education was necessary for young men, differing only in their manner of achieving that: through lectures and text-books, or through implicit teaching and curricula as well as in ‘informal’ religious instruction. Implicit there, and subsequently in the CNE, 1959 and the TF, 2001-02, is a condemnation of the always-present (read always-traditional) societal norms that do not engender such character in the young men and women entering colleges. There is felt to be no natural corrective to the abnormal condition of the youth. Rather, the institutions must normalise these students to combat the ‘backwardness’ and obstructionist values of ‘passivity’ and ‘indifference’ that are preventing the citizenry from owing full allegiance to the state. The existing system of values is thus by implication immoral, or at best amoral, and the Heroic university

must needs struggle against this Problem to succeed in inculcating a more ‘appropriate’ attitude. As Saigol notes in the context of the Sharif Report, ‘While colonial education was designed to create quiescent subjects of the Raj, post-colonial education was meant to fashion ‘citizens’ in the same image – obedient, loyal, hard working and able to subordinate themselves to authority... education was designed to homogenize, standardize and engender conformity to the regime’s vision of a developed and modern nation.’¹⁷ This, as pointed out by Lyotard, is a particularly common trait of both the modern State and the modern University.¹⁸

The Whole Man

An integral component of the ‘attitudes appropriate to a free and independent nation’ for the Report is a holistic education, with an emphasis on creativity. Thus, ‘Educational progress calls for imagination, initiative, and a spirit of daring to seek new answers to old problems’ (pg 9). In the context of the call for nation-building, this creativity is evidently to be targeted at the goals of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ and a solution to problems. The Commission noted that such creativity could not be born out of a one-sided education, and thus while stressing the sciences and technology, also mentioned just as frequently the importance of the arts, letters and humanities. Education must be ‘broad-based’, and in ‘both pass and honours courses the first year should include general courses in the humanities and social sciences for science students, natural sciences for arts students, and the English language for all’ (pg 20). Laying emphasis on solving ‘practical problems facing our country’, the Report separately notes that, ‘We need to be sure that we go on producing philosophers, for example, whose chief business would be to reflect and to think across the artificial barriers between subjects and disciplines. We shall always need our philosophers and poets, even as we need our physicists and mathematicians’ (pg 22). At the same time, students in mass communications departments should be equipped not only with the ‘skills of reporting and presentation but also with a broad general education’ (pg 22). In particular, in the context of the overarching recommendation to establish further teaching universities which may not be very large, the Report notes that ‘it should, however, offer a balanced programme of studies including the basic Arts and Sciences’ (pg 43).

¹⁵ Mahmood, Syed, 1895. *A History of English Education in India: 1781 to 1893*. Aligarh: MAO College.

¹⁶ Mahmood (1895, *ibid*: 111-118).

¹⁷ Saigol, 2003 (*op.cit*: 12).

¹⁸ Lyotard notes that, ‘The State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the ‘people,’ under the name of the ‘nation,’ in order to point them down the path of progress.’ (1984: 32)

The same focus is evident in the pedagogy, which must ensure that ‘the student receives the guidance and inspiration to develop the spirit of enquiry and investigation that is the very essence of higher education’ (pg 30). Thus tutorials and close student-teacher contact are emphasised, along with use of well-equipped libraries and laboratories. The teacher, too, has the primary task to ‘stimulate the interest of the student in his field of study, to awaken a spirit of enquiry and criticism, and to develop habits of patience, and perseverance’ (pg 29).

Again, the search for a ‘whole man’, a scientist, a critic, and a man of letters and the arts, is neither new nor complete. The Task Force, too, in its report in 2002¹⁹ looks to ‘produce’ such a man, heroically surmounting the Problems and Challenges strewn by society in such a Creation. In the earlier Indian Educational Policy of 1904, the British Government had to surmount a slightly different problem, in that one ‘charge against’ higher education, particularly of the Mahommadan’s, is that ‘courses of study are too purely literary in character’.²⁰ In its goal ‘of promoting the moral no less than the intellectual and physical well-being of their students,’ the British Government had to surmount its own Problems and Challenges, such as English as the medium of instruction. Nevertheless the search for a ‘general education’ was on, even in technical institutes (*ibid*: 34).

What is noteworthy in the Sharif Report is that there is no example of how the arts and humanities can actually aid in the massive undertaking of nation-building, beyond vague references to ‘reflection’. And, furthermore, that the critique that may actually be present in society in terms of drop-outs from university and the much-bemoaned ‘attitudes’ is simply not recognised. Furthermore, the very fact that so much stress is laid on the development of the whole man indicates an implicit assumption that society by itself cannot create the whole man, hence the need for a heroic teacher in a normalising university.

Edging Forward

The heroism of the teacher and the normalising function of the university, in a continuous struggle against the traditionalist and obstructionist passivity and indifference of society at large, creates an eerie sub-text of the Report. On the one hand, as above, there is a clear and explicit sense that the university must be-in-Pakistan – from the nation to the community to the collegiality of scholars. On the other hand, the university cannot immerse itself into the public or private spheres, and there is a ‘need for the

scholar of an atmosphere conducive to quiet study’ (pg 52). There is an implicit sense that the university must, in a certain manner, be removed from that society, must bracket out the ontic existents around it.

Physically, in order to create an ‘atmosphere proper to a university it is highly desirable that they be located outside congested urban areas ... [on] suitable land made available to them and regulations laid down forbidding the alienation of this land for other than university development purposes’ (pg 39). Likewise, one problem in teaching is that ‘once independence was achieved, the teacher was not allowed to return to his classroom and laboratory, nor the student to his studies’ (pg 39). The student and teacher unrest caused by political elements was part of the ‘struggle for independence’ that ‘employed with singular success both passive resistance and civil disobedience’. However, ‘the politician has since then continually attempted to embroil the academic community in partisan politics’ (pg 39). The Commission identifies the challenge as one of rescuing the ‘lawful authority’ of the university from the clutches of student and teacher manipulation by political forces. This may well be a part of the discrediting of politicians during martial law, so familiar in Pakistan by now. However, the undecided, even conflicting nature of the desire is evident when lauding the civil unrest that led to independence but condemning it afterwards (particularly against the military regime of Ayub Khan).²¹ At the same time, there is a mental block in understanding that the bulk of society, particularly students and teachers, may well have felt as alienated from the lawful authority of the Pakistani university as they did from the lawful authority of the British Indian one.

This is amplified in the case of the young student who is ‘still growing and will continue to grow most of the time he is in college.’ The student is expected to grow further and further apart from his parents and ‘village friends’ who have not received a university education. Not just intellectually but also socially, ‘the student and his family will become strangers holding different values and governed by different standards.’ While the Report takes this as a given, and also implies that the uneducated masses at the student’s origin are in some manner lower than the brightly progressing student on a journey of discovery, it uses this to advocate for a complete university experience, including sports, entertainment, food, and ‘guidance’ from teachers immersed in the university environment. The narrative here morally and intellectually disregards the ‘poor origins of the family’ while advocating the creation of a text-book

¹⁹ Government of Pakistan (*op.cit*, 2002).

²⁰ Government of India, 1904. *Indian Educational Policy*. Calcutta: Government Printing: 7.

²¹ It is ironic that one of the primary factors in Ayub Khan’s fall in 1969 was the active student movement.

hero archetype out of the humble-origin student.²² This is a heart-rending picture of a student torn from his origins in search of a better, brighter future, having to overcome travails, and then returning to impart wisdom to a lost people. In any case, the need to keep the university on the edge of society is quite evident throughout the Report, both to keep it isolated from 'negative' attitudes and 'cynicism' of society, and to keep it sanitised from politics (i.e. reality), the stated aversion against an ivory tower notwithstanding.

At the same time, there is an expression of the university at the edge of the future. The heroic sense of identification with a limitless future is overwhelming, as 'Pakistan is a relatively new state, destined to play, we believe, an important role in this complex world' (pg 16) and education is undeniably 'needed for the creation of a progressive and democratic society' (pg 10). It is in this context that the placement of higher education, especially the corporate teaching/ research university, is underscored as leading the society into a brighter future, since 'an effective system of higher education not only serves society's present needs but must also help to give direction and impetus to the course of human progress' (pg 15).

The edginess of the university is a recurrent stream of undecidability in the Report: to immerse the institution in-Pakistan, and yet to recognise and keep it away, sanitised, from the impurities in the body of society. It is a direct result of colonial policies that sought to inculcate a 'European knowledge' through 'Western institutions', policies that puzzlingly encountered apathy, indifference and passive resistance to the white project of modernising by removing the 'natural defects in the Native mind', but found a way out by institutionalizing education in the university. There is only one conclusion to be drawn from such a reading of the Sharif Report: not only is the university at the edge of society, but that is where it must be kept.

Empire Haunting

A notable feature of the CNE report is its recognition of the colonial roots of the education system in Pakistan, including higher education, as well as the 'pattern of attitudes and values current in our society' that has 'thwarted all our efforts at nation-building'. At the level of education policies and systems, the

Report is clear that the 'education in Pakistan has its roots in this period [of foreign rule] of the history of the sub-continent. The system created then was designed to produce government servants... the range of educational opportunities was limited to those which contributed to the attainment of competence in some of the skills of government' (pg 5). It is interesting to note that while the report condemns the colonial system for focusing only on skills to 'operate the State', the same objective pervades its own recommendations for the new nation-state of Pakistan.

The Report does not enter into any detail with regard to how the educational content or pedagogy is actually colonial beyond the general statement above. The same is true of its recognition that 'our existing Acts are drawn up mainly on the old pattern of London University. London University has changed its Acts along with the times, and although some of our universities have also carried out some modifications of their Acts, the basic structure still remains the same' (pg 46). The primary concern is that universities remain largely affiliating centres rather than teaching and research corporations, 'upon which we lay the greatest emphasis.' The Report then proceeds to lay out in 10 paragraphs (pp 48-50) the proposed legal structure of universities, which became the blueprint for subsequent reorganisation of university legislation in 1973. Again, it is interesting that there is no additional analysis ('loosening of bonds')²³ of colonial features in the legislation. The proposed structure, therefore, retains most of the important provisions of the existing colonial Acts, including the overriding authority of the Chancellor as a senior representative of the federal government, and the exclusionary governance structure within the university.

The Report's recognition of colonisation of mindsets – 'they are the attitudes of a subject people rather than of free men' – sets this point off in greater contrast. In relatively long sections, the Report regrets the same indifference and 'passivity' of the 'masses' prevalent in the 12th year of independence that was an effective 'weapon of resistance' against the British Empire. The opening premise of the Report is that 'it is the persistence of a historical pattern, no longer appropriate to the circumstances in which we find ourselves today, that has thwarted all our attempts at nation-building' (pg 5). This is diluted upon throughout the introduction and through

²² Ahmed (1994) demonstrates how this archetype is widely projected and practiced in Pakistan. She notes especially how the ancient archetype is modified in that the ancient hero's eventual fall – through betrayal and/ or hubris – never occurs in the modern projection; rather, the hero is seen as (pathologically) never completing the journey. The cycle of rise, fall and rebirth is stunted, and death as the end of the journey is perpetually hidden from sight. Given the close relationship between this archetype and the stage of adolescence in young men, Ahmed demonstrates how this indicates a perpetual immaturity and narrow focus across the spectrum of modern rationalists and religious fundamentalists alike in Pakistan.

²³ analysis: ... from Greek analysis 'a breaking up,' from *analein* 'unloose,' from *ana-* 'up, throughout' + *lysis* 'a loosening'; www.etymonline.com

the chapter on higher education, in an idiom of people's resistance to colonial rule such that:

'every action of government, whether intrinsically good or bad, met with a storm of protest. Even those measures that were clearly in the public interest, and there were many, felt the sting of aggressive criticism. Government was viewed as an evil, and non-co-operation became the badge of patriotism. Passivity... was transformed into a weapon of resistance... As a consequence we were left with... a lack of acceptance of a recognised authority in public life' (pp 5-6).

The Report further attributes to these attitudes the prevalent problems of 'provincialism', 'communalism' and an 'undignified scramble for position and a tendency to place self before service to the community' (pg 6). There is a certain, implicit condemnation of the 'people' who have somehow not fully recognised that the government is now of a 'free and independent nation', and not of the 'evil' Empire. 'One by one we witnessed the reappearance of the old attitudes of passivity, indiscipline, opportunism and regionalism' (pg 6). And this condemnation extends to the 'strong, dedicated and responsible leadership' that 'failed to emerge in our country'. To complicate matters further, 'there was no shift in the attitude of many government workers as we moved from foreign rule to independent status' (pg 7).

Consequently (and, incidentally, contrary to the stated aim of creating a 'welfare state' – pg 11), the Report notes that, 'To begin with, the people should revise their concept of Government and their relationship to it' (pg 8). While asking the Government to reorient itself from satisfying individual interests to 'overall development of the country', the Report principally emphasises the need for the population to pay for services from their own resources, desist from criticising, and resist the impulse, 'so willingly succumbed to in the past, to petition government for every service'.

The issue of identification can be seen at work here in shifting the allegiance of indigenous systems of reproduction of knowledge to a Western-Europe specific episteme. This 'reorientation and reorganization' of education amounted to no less than a direct continuation of allegiance to Europe-specific Enlightenment that was instilled by British colonisers through systems of pedagogy, institutional development, educational content and breadth, and approach

to criticism (and hence the arts). The Sharif Report thus shows no probing of the reasons for the continuation of reactionary attitudes in the populace: that the bulk of the population may have had as little stake in Pakistan in 1959 as it did in the colony of British India, and thus responded very similarly.

While appreciating the colonial legacy of government in general, and education in particular, the Report makes no attempt to 'loosen the bonds' by appreciating how that has translated into Pakistan, 12 years after independence. There is no recognition of the possibility that the passivity being condemned may be an outcome of popular alienation from an uncaring state, and that little may have practically changed to affect that alienation. Rather there is an unpleasant sense of victimisation, the all-too-sinister sense that the government and leadership, such as it is, may be associated by implication with the colonisers. The desire / admiration of the colonising Other is in evidence in the Report's explicit contention that all may not have been awry with the Empire's measures. Furthermore, there is an implicit allegiance to an a-cultural system of institutions ('the case since universities were first founded in the Middle Ages') that is in fact Other in origin (the Middle Ages between Darkness and Light were experienced only in Europe, in much of Asia this time was a zenith of cultural and intellectual advancement). Then, there is the all-too-common call for modernising.²⁴ The fear of being associated with colonisers by the people is more explicitly in evidence, in the exhortations to 'people' to adopt attitudes more appropriate to a 'free and independent nation' and the need to inculcate a respect for the authority of the new State.

This uncanny possibility of conflating the Self with the Other is thus expressed as both fear and desire, an undecidability between becoming the Other and hermeneutically processing the necessary alterity before transcending it. The ambiguity necessitates a closer look at how colonial policies in fact transformed the production and reproduction of knowledge to such an extent that a 'free and independent' nation is ever bound to owe allegiance to the modern West in its progress toward being-in-society, normalising the population, and seeking the whole man.

'Modernity' in Pakistan

These six themes can thus be readily identified as underlying the Report of the Commission on National Education. They indicate not only a certain undecid-

²⁴ 'Education in India, in the modern sense of the word, may be said to date from the year 1854, when the Court of Directors, in a memorable dispatch, definitely accepted the systematic promotion of general education as one of the duties of the State, and emphatically declared that the type of education which they desired to see extended in India was that which had for its object the diffusion of the arts, science, philosophy, and literature of Europe; in short, of European knowledge' (GoI, 1904: 1); and 'The two overriding imperatives of Ayub Khan's military regime, as manifested in... the Sharif Report were national integration and homogenization [, and] modernization of the economy and society' (Saigol, 2003: 2).

ability in this most important text, and hence in modernity in Pakistan, but also a *certain* type of modernity. A range of work now exists with regard to multiple modernities,²⁵ and this dismembering of a universal, imagined modernity is but one strand of a long-standing, global critique of the notion. Whether or not it has value in itself theoretically, what the now-well-articulated shift from modernity to modernities means is a far greater sensitivity to the historical, cultural nature of modernity as a construct. Reviewing the themes of Pakistan-ness, or nation building, normalcy, complete citizenship, the future, and the past, provides some indication of the manner in which modernity has been constructed in Pakistan, in the backdrop of a framework of multiple modernities. What this yields, perhaps more precisely, is the nature of the modern University in Pakistan as an imagined destination. The very undecidability behind these themes indicates some central concerns at the core of what, in fact, it means to be modern in Pakistan.

It has been argued above that beyond lack of reflection on these themes, and the varied undecidability underlying them, is that the historical construction

of modernity in higher education in Pakistan has been decisively shaped by the experience of colonisation, most especially in the globally crucial 19th and 20th centuries. The CNE Report, as above, is haunted by the Empire, but importantly in a non-reflective manner. The certain type of modernity instilled in the higher education of Pakistan is, rather, a certain relationship of institutionalised and integrated colonisation. I have separately examined some of the nature and implications of this relationship, not just to the British but to the British *colonial*.²⁶ At one level, however, just the use of the term 'colonial', and especially postcolonial, acts as a barrier to thorough reflection on the *nature* of colonial influence, that is a closer look into how precisely colonisation was experienced and had an influence. The existence of a 'modernities' perspective also opens up the need to review the precise nature of colonial influence. This reading of the CNE report has attempted to highlight some of the ways in which the historical *fact* of colonisation has shaped the trajectory not just of higher education but of the amorphous, pervasive impulse to be 'modern' in Pakistan.

About the Author

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I am engaged in teaching and research in the emerging field of Cultural Studies in the only such department in Pakistan. NCA is the country's leading arts education institution, and the only one in the public sector. My research work has focussed on constructions of modernity and their philosophical and cultural implications in Pakistan. I am now increasingly philosophically unpacking the notion of multiple modernities in the historicised context of Pakistan, which incorporates elements of postcolonialism and religion. I have been examining the institution of higher education in Pakistan. However, this work is now leading to a rounder understanding of the phenomenon known as 'radical Islam' or 'fundamentalism', whose impacts are being (violently and non-violently) felt nationally and globally.

²⁵ For a review, cf Pieterse, Jan N. forthcoming. *Multiple Modernities*.

²⁶ *Cannons to Canons: Imperialist Policies for Higher Education in British India* (forthcoming).