**Class is Still Relevant**

**The simmering tensions will transcend into practical action. In the long march of history.**

[Irtiza Shafaat Bokharee](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/irtiza-shafaat-bokharee)

April 24, 2024

[Newspaper](https://www.nation.com.pk/newspaper), [Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

Classical modernisation theory posits that high literacy rates are a social precondition for any kind of democratic dispensation to emerge in the real world. An educated middle- class, it is stated, can become a bulwark against elite capture. Without resorting to a fasciststyled anti-intellectualism, this overly-simplistic framework needs to be problematised because when we question the conceptual underpinnings of the terms “education” and “democracy,” multiple nuances emerge.

Is political education distinct from formal education? While there could be a significant overlap, it is quite possible that someone without a Bachelor’s degree, or even without having finished high school, might be hyper-aware about socio-political complexities in developing Pakistan, where patronage networks and the consequent clientelism, kinship, and other ascriptive factors based on accidents of birth, rule the roost. And this sort of reality might not just be found in rural settings, alone.

[KPPSC chief calls on KP Governor, presents annual report](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2024/kppsc-chief-calls-on-kp-governor-presents-annual-report)

This is where this line of argument gets even more interesting, as access to thana- katcheri networks matters as much in urban spaces, as it does in rural spaces. While highly speculative in nature, a generalisation could be drawn that urban dwellers with private undergraduate degrees, living in their protected environments and relative privilege, might struggle to navigate through these complicated frames, and lack the practical wisdom, which might not be obtained merely via bookish knowledge. Before moving further, it is safe to assert that schools are not the only arena where people learn about the art of practicing politics, or competing for power. Most of this socialisation process takes place at homes, within extended family networks, in neighbourhoods, at mosques, so on and so forth.

If the content of Pakistan Studies syllabi is studied, which is the same in both private and public schools, and courses mandatory at the university level, it becomes quite clear that the quality of political education being imparted is based around static conceptions of state-driven ideology and extremely skewed in favour of the status-quo. Moreover, students do not develop the abstract reasoning skills to access secular histories, empathise with populations on the margins, imagine counterfactuals, and most importantly, learn to speak truth to power.

[Swati vows to run KP assembly affairs indiscriminately](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2024/swati-vows-to-run-kp-assembly-affairs-indiscriminately)

I have observed that in a lot of cases, bright students with inquisitive minds have gotten derailed and demotivated in their early academic journeys because they asked too many questions in Pakistan Studies or Islamiyat classes. The teachers know only one solution: labelling those students as deviant and severely reprimanding them. This sort of dogmatism in classrooms leads such students to reject the classroom as a mode of serious inquiry. Those who chose to rebel against what is considered “civil” and “normal” often find themselves ostracised in class, where a mediocre instructor turns the herd and the least common denominator in classroom dynamics against them, leading to bullying outside of the classroom. Mob rule follows. Black and white narratives with static conceptions of heroes and villains in history class are to be rote-learned for passing exams, which is why many students find studying history to be a painful chore. This propagandist model of imposing a blinkered version of the past needs to change, and the powers that be need to show flexibility so that students are able to re-imagine the past, and find faults with those at the helm-of-affairs, who failed to set the nature and direction of state policy into a welfarist direction, benefiting the least-advantaged and most marginalised groups and individuals and ensuring healthy quotas and affirmative a

[Decision made to float tender for CRBC project by July](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2024/decision-made-to-float-tender-for-crbc-project-by-july)

It is advised that students are taught to develop empathy and compassion for those below them in the social ladder, and that lessons are framed so as to encourage young impressionable minds to tolerate ambiguity in matters of historical affairs and develop a healthy disposition to be able to approach the vagaries inherent in the human experience with a stoic fortitude. Last thing we need is a 100% literacy rate based around the current syllabus.

When Charles Ramsey questions the rootedness of modern and liberal university students in their local cultural histories and suggests that they are often left believing in “half baked” tropes, it does reflect truthfully on one portion of the story. On the other hand, a large majority of madressah students are brainwashed into believing a one-sided world view, and even though there might be rootedness, they are hardly turning out to be champions of universal humanism or defends of the basic dignity of all. There is a dangerous amount of scepticism of science, on the one hand, not one which is coming from developing an open scientific disposition, but a reactionary parochial rebuttal. With two decades of four-year undergraduate degree programs being offered in Pakistan gone, slowly students are opting to study social science, by choice, instead of engineering or medicine. But they are still in the minority.

[SCCI chief accuses chamber officials of doing mega corruption](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2024/scci-chief-accuses-chamber-officials-of-doing-mega-corruption)

Often, stakeholders in epistemic communities make two reductionist arguments. One, that Pakistan is still not ready for adult franchise due to a low literacy rate. By no means is that acceptable, in any way or form, in the 21st century and it cannot be accepted by those sensitised to debates on civil and political liberties, globally. Two, that the Bachelor’s degree should be reintroduced as a minimum requirement for those entering parliament. In a setting where getting a Bachelor’s degree itself is a matter of having privilege, where the state is failing to deliver quality education to the impoverished masses, and only 4-5 percent of the population can afford to pay the fees at top ranked universities in urban centres, this will just exacerbate elite capture, rather than stymying its effects. And when the parliaments are increasingly filled with upper-class individuals who never scored above C grades in their academic career in Pakistan but had the money to earn foreign degrees as a consequence of family wealth, this proposal just seems to be reflect elitist contempt of the “dangerous classes” at the bottom of the ladder.

[Justice Mansoor for performance monitoring dashboards at all levels](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2024/justice-mansoor-for-performance-monitoring-dashboards-at-all-levels)

If those classes, deemed to be docile and subservient, find avenues to find solidarity, and turn it into collective action, against the top 5% in this country, and understand the disdain through which the elites view them, it will be game over for those residing unjustly at the top. The simmering tensions will transcend into practical action. In the long march of history.

Irtiza Shafaat Bokharee

The writer is a faculty member at the Department of Political Science at Forman Christian College University.