

25

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6

Pakistan

Social Change Through Schools

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POLITICAL opportunism, a lack of representation in the electoral system, and an insensitivity towards the genuine needs of the common people of Pakistan, in the past, has brought many sorrows upon the country. Such a state of affairs has also been the greatest source of social and political instability. The country has experienced dismemberment, insurgencies, and terrorism causing the destruction of public and private property and innumerable tragic deaths in many of our major cities. Corruption, the source of all evils, has become institutionalized and accepted as a norm which is destroying the very social fabric of the country. Yet, there seems to be a general apathy and lack of will-power towards solving of the most serious social problems in the country. There is little hope of older generation getting out of the throes of despair; they seem to have lost faith in themselves and their country. The time has come for the intellectuals to draw up a long-term salvage plan that begins with the grass-roots, and from the schools.

There is still great hope for the future generations in Pakistan. We must guide our youth to take control of their destiny and work towards the prosperity of their country. There are many things right from the school level that they can participate in to show the way towards hope, happiness, and progress. A few of the issues where the schools can play a positive and effective role are discussed below.

First, the lack of general awareness about our environment has been responsible for the dirt and filth in the streets, roads, parks, and streams and rivers. Our rivers are heavily polluted, the air that our citizens breathe contain dangerous levels of pollutants, our streets are breeding grounds for diseases, and our sewerage system is failing due to littering of vegetable refuse, papers, and clothing.

We recommend that sound programmes be developed for teaching

and training school children to actively participate in the improvement of environment. Nothing could be a more effective measure than a small school child discussing with his/her family the benefits of clean environment or demonstrating by actually cleaning the litter from the streets, or preventing his colleagues from littering. The schools can also give assignments coupled with various incentives to their students.

The legacy of government misrule is manifest in the numerous bouts of sectarianism and religious hatred, and exploitation of religion for personal gains. Playing on religious passions is perhaps the most dangerous weapons for undoing any society or country. There is an urgent need for preventing efforts to spread religious hatred in the schools. The schools should rather, teach their students to be true believers of Islam which teaches self-control, religious tolerance, discipline, and brotherhood. We hope that if efforts are taken now, our future generations can live together in peace and harmony.

Next, our citizens have little regard for traffic rules which has resulted in numerous accidents and loss of life and property as well as unnecessary traffic jams. While, authorities issuing driving licenses should enforce strict traffic rules, respect for sound traffic rules must begin from the schools. Children should be taught the basic rules such as crossing the streets, respect for traffic signals, driving in one's own lane, staying within speed limits, care during overtaking, parking in designated areas, and above all patience as a part of driving skills. It is hoped the young generation who will be driving with their relatives or in other public transport, will have a beneficial influence on their older drivers.

Furthermore, in recent years, there has been a serious spread of drugs that not only has given the country a bad name, but has inflicted this addiction upon some three mil-

lion Pakistanis. In many western countries, we have observed the spread of drugs even in the junior sections. Barring a few sporadic cases, we have so far been spared of this curse in our schools. However, our schools should take preventive measures right now. Our students must be taught the evils of drugs that endanger both one's life and one's honor. Sound efforts should be made in the schools to promote healthy citizenship, and to prevent the spread of the unhealthy addictions or habits.

Another, very sad and dangerous development, especially in the past thirty years, is that we have grown into a nation of self-haters. We don't seem to find good in anything. We are also a people bestowed with a highly emotional and short-tempered mentality. Pakistan has a rich history and culture, one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world, productive agro-climatic conditions, and its people are highly industrious. Our schools must be able to highlight the positive aspects of our country and imbue in our children a sense of confidence, self-respect, and respect for their culture and country. The schools can arrange field visits that will educate the children about the potentials our country possesses. Summer camps can also be organized for social work in villages and the remote parts of our country.

Finally, as Pakistan was conceived to be a land of promise and reward, and a land of justice, equality, love, and peace, people see it as their right to have a decent quality of life and modern amenities that should accompany this. People have the right to have productive employment and business opportunities; they see democracy as the only way for attaining equality, representation, progress, and the fulfillment of their dreams. Citizens are now asking for reforms whereby honest, sincere, educated, enlightened, and up-to-date and true representatives of the

people are given an opportunity to serve. We must develop a democratic culture right at the school level. Our curricula, teaching, and students activities should all be tailored to develop such a democratic culture which demands a sense of responsibility, compromise, and respect for others so that when our student, mature they understand what democracy is all about, and how we can achieve a truly democratic society.

The recap, our past leadership has failed in the proper governance of the country. They have totally dislocated our economy and for its ills they alone are responsible. Yet, the leadership seem to have lost any workable options to steer the country out of its present morass. The choices seem to be clear: we could change the system through a bloody revolution or invite a military dictatorship. However, both these choices, under the existing circumstances, would undoubtedly lead to further dismemberment of the country. On the other hand, the alternative to Pakistan's security is subjugation at the hands of our adversaries who are the enemies of our religion and culture. We must save the country or we must perish. We must plan for laying the foundation of a sustainable society and political stability starting now for the future generations.

The schools in Pakistan must now endeavor to take an active role in the transformation of the country. It would take a little while to bring back sanity to our politics and governance, but it certainly is a sustainable and effective way of running the country in the future. Patriotic leadership and thinking citizens must support the schools in providing a balanced education to the country's children. The schools should develop sound and practical programmes that will imbue in our children a sense of responsibility, democratic values, unity, honesty, patriotism, religious harmony, and above all faith in ourselves and in our individual, God-gifted abilities.