

Do Lahori Elite Schools Perpetuate Colonialist Ideology?

The colonizers may have left this land in 1947, but some of the core ideas and structures they used to coerce the Indians into submission stick with us to date. The British introduced laws and policies that led to the silencing of the indigenous colonized Indians, particularly by imposing their English values onto them, and rationalizing this imposition, erecting walls amongst the natives so much so that such walls continue to divide the community, further inequality, and sustain unfair power dynamics, even today. However, it is not to say that pre-colonial India was the land of milk and honey because it had its fair share of problems and societal divisions, one of them being the caste systems of *jati* and *varna*, but it is important to understand the damage caused by the British colonizers who took advantage of the natives and exploited them to create further problems. One of the ways the British mechanized the process of colonization was using education as a tool to control the masses. Unfortunately, these processes were uncritically adopted and internalized by many, especially the educated elite, who continue to uphold and perpetuate these values. This paper will argue and explore that the private Lahori elite schools play a substantial role in furthering this colonialist ideology. This paper will use some key texts by Frantz Omar Fanon, Edward Said, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and many more post-colonial intellectuals who played a seminal role in deconstructing colonization.

To understand the aspect of the colonial legacy of Lahori elite schools, one needs to trace back to the foundations of education in colonial India. Colonial India had two types of elite schools: one designated for the hereditary aristocracy known as the chiefs' college, and the other for the burgeoning elite class called the English or the European schools. The function of these

institutions largely revolved around meeting the social and political ends of the colonizers. The chiefs' colleges aimed to Anglicize the new generation of aristocrats so that the existing colonizer-colonized power dynamic stayed in place, and events like the Great Rebellion of 1857 could be prevented. While, on the other hand, the European schools had limited seats as only 15 percent of the Indians could enroll in them (schools in Bombay were an exception with 20 percent enrolment). These schools were based on the structure of British public schools and included missionaries (Rahman).

One of the fundamental propellants of colonization was the English Education Act of 1835. It led to the institutionalization of the English language and officially ushered in the implementation of the English culture. Thomas Babington Macaulay, member of the Council of India, in the famous Macaulay's Minutes presented the need to shift the allocation of funds from native studies of Indian culture, language, religion, and tradition to English Language, culture, values, and science in front of the Committee of Public Instruction. An Orientalist reading of the text allows us to see how the natives were explicitly seen as inferior who had to be saved as Macaulay blatantly revealed his Anglicist ideals, "English is better worth knowing than Sanscrit or Arabic" (Speeches by Lord Macaulay). This instance was the watershed moment whereby reallocating funds from Oriental studies implied that English was being used as a tool to erase the moral and religious values of the Indians (Viswanathan). Similar pedagogical practices continue to date, especially in Lahori-elite schools that champion themselves to be torchbearers of the best education. Little do they realize that they are perpetuating the colonialist ideology.

Frantz Fanon's message in *The Wretched of the Earth* helps us understand that "The changeover (after independence from the colonizers) will not take place at the level of the

structures set up by the bourgeoisie during its reign, since that caste has done nothing more than take over unchanged the legacy of the economy, the thought, and the institutions left by the colonialists” (Fanon). Highlighting the broad trends in the nature of rule in the post-colonial world, he put forward the idea that the national bourgeoisie of the native land mimic the colonizers and do not make an effort to change the structures set up by them. This applies in the case of education in Pakistan, particularly elite private schools.

In the post-colonial state of Pakistan today, the education system roughly divides schools into two categories: private and public schools. Here private English-medium schools are divided into three main groups, namely “state-influenced schools, elite private schools, and non-elite schools”. The state-elite schools are predominantly cadet colleges that impart subsidized education to children of army background (Rahman). Lahori elite schools fall under the second category.

In order to understand the dynamics better, it is crucial to trace the origins of these schools. A formative policy of nationalization of all private schools in 1972 was introduced under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s nationalization policy that followed the Martial Law Regulation 118 (Government of Punjab, 1982). However, the regulation allowed for the existence of such private institutions that ran “on a genuinely benevolent, philanthropic and non-commercial basis”. It is interesting to note that while the number of private schools decreased significantly from 3,814 in 1968 to 927 in 1977 (Jimenez), another trend was underway. Many elite institutions like Atchison College, using the mentioned regulatory statement, escaped the policy. Also, as a consequence of this policy, and once again using the mentioned statement, many of the private

Lahori elite schools, including Lahore Grammar School and Beaconhouse School System, came into being too.

Many have analyzed the schooling culture of Pakistan using the lens of economic capital and found it to be extremely bourgeoisie. The type of knowledge the upper and middle class uphold is celebrated within the society as these students are presumed to be linguistically, culturally, and educationally superior because of the affiliation with their institutions. On the one hand, the privileged are celebrated because of their accidental accessibility to such institutions, while on the other hand, the working class pupils are encouraged to follow their class-habitus whereby they themselves are coerced into limiting their hopes and ambitions, in many cases (Bourdieu). The latter come to believe that it is hardly possible for them to overcome the difference of class.

Curle fittingly analyzed the policies of education of Pakistan soon after its independence and assessed, “the goal of Pakistani society was not change, but stability. Education was not thought of as a means of promoting democracy, or spreading egalitarianism, or increasing social mobility; rather, on the contrary, its role was to maintain the status quo” (71).

Edward Said, in his monumental work *Orientalism*, argues how knowledge is a construct and the power dynamics involved create “not only the knowledge but the very reality they appear to describe” (94). The role power dynamics play in constructing knowledge that ultimately describes the reality for the readers is cemented by Michel Foucault, who argued that power goes hand in hand with nature, and its manifestations can be found in the “regimes of truth”. He mentioned the importance of the presence of discourse in the maintenance of such power

dynamics that give rise to power structures in society. In connection to this, it is the colonial discourse that has uncritically been accepted by many in the post-colonial Pakistani state and is now being perpetuated, directly or indirectly, by the elite schools, to a large extent.

One may ask that why is such a discourse problematic? For that, it is essential to break down the politics behind colonial education. The British found it economically more beneficial for themselves to only provide such a nature of education to the locals where they could only find themselves in lower-level positions in the Indian bureaucracy. The goal was to restrain the Indians from ruling themselves and hence, foreigners were recruited to fill in the authoritative positions. This dynamic discouraged the locals from applying for Indian Civil Service because they knew that they would be more likely to end up in a lower-level position, mostly of clerical nature, regardless of the effort they put in their studies. This systematic exclusion of the natives was strengthened by the policies of colonial education that aimed to capitalize on the pre-existing caste differentials in the Indian society and also further racial divides (O'Brien).

To that end, it is incumbent to understand that the role of education is not to cater to the selfish needs of some particular groups, classes, and races, in the society; rather, the role of education is societal. Educational knowledge that is unbiased and free from propaganda ought to be imparted among the masses.

The cultural practices encouraged in Lahori elite schools create a bubble around the young minds where they mostly interact with students from the same economic, social, and cultural backgrounds. This hinders them from interacting with an average Pakistani young person and the years of similar experiences in their school lives isolates the elite students from

their own realities. This is very similar to the dynamics found in the colonial era, where the British deliberately created a distance between the Nawabs and the Maharajas that were under them and the local Indians. This was another tactic used by the British to strengthen their own selfish aims of strong governance because it would detach the local rulers from the masses, making it easier for the passive acceptance of British values by the local rulers.

Another direct form of colonization used by the British was through language, whose reverberations can be felt even today. The politics behind language was that English was used as a primary symbol to carry out the process of Anglicisation, which the colonizers openly mentioned. Lord Curzen, the Viceroy of India, mentioned, “the young chiefs (who were supposed to learn the English language and become sufficiently familiar with English customs, literature, science, mode of thought, standards of truth and honor) would be allies of the British” (qtd. in Khattak).

The schools continue to uphold the Western values and cultures, where the ruling bodies also protect these schools because they help maintain the status quo. It has been argued by many that the bourgeoisie and the ruling class of Pakistan that includes the military leaders, bureaucracy, and the feudal lords, closely abide by the practices of the colonizers to maintain the apartheid of education where only certain privileged groups in the society experience quality education and acquire skills. This maintains the power dynamics of viewing the majority of locals as inferior to the education elite (Moniza). However, the reality is that the type of education one gets is largely accidental and is contingent upon where one is born.

One of the major themes prevalent in colonial India which profoundly resonates with the environment today was how the curriculum was limited to cater to the local needs. There was a deliberate effort by the British to Anglicise the locals. One can say that Lahori elite schools that offer education supervised and examined by external boards such as the O and A Level or *the International Baccalaureate (IB)* too play a role in distancing the students of these elite schools from their own culture. However, it is important to point out that the dynamics do differ a lot here because the intention behind imparting such knowledge is not malignant, as was the case in colonial India. But, it is comparable in the sense that education does alienate the elite which ends up acquiring more social and cultural capital than the locals and the former ends up unaware of the real challenges faced by the average people.

Along with that, the students in such schools are not in touch with their cultural heritage or with their history, even though they may have the potential, and more importantly, the resources of carefully studying their own native land. For instance, to my dismay, not long ago I realized I know more about Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points than about Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Fourteen Points because my World History course was designed in a way that it required more studying hours and more detailed content learning than my Pakistan Studies course in O Level.

Furthermore, the culture sustained by the Lahori elite schools also revolves around colonial ideals of exclusion, and ridiculing the average local person, to a large extent. Extra-curricular activities such as Model UNs are more popular amongst students than debates in local languages or even Parliamentary Debates where the former gives a more globalized approach to the students, while the latter two are more likely to focus on local issues. The Lahori

MUN circuit is one of the most fitting examples that can help illustrate how the students who do not follow a certain type of mannerism are bullied. Granted that the English language is an obligation to be followed during the Committee Sessions, but the overall environment has become a cult of pupils that worship and prefer certain accents over other, have a certain tilt towards Western consumption of media and Euro-centric beliefs. Students are encouraged, and often times pressurized, to apply to international universities without having an appreciation for local colleges and universities. The fascination with the English language and Western Culture in Lahori schools too is so great that students are not allowed to speak in local languages in official school timings. There have been instances where students were also fined for speaking in Punjabi in school. Draconian policies like such propel the young minds to internalize the colonialist ideology whereby they are repulsed from local traditions and languages and look down upon those who do not follow the same orientalist ideology of seeing the Western as the superior culture, directly or indirectly, while looking down upon our own.

Additionally, many parents are motivated by external factors to do their all to enroll their children in such schools, oftentimes leaving their own cities or villages and migrating to larger metropolitan cities like Lahore or Karachi. These schools are believed to have a strong link with future progress as they become hotspots for opportunities, especially spring boarding pupils in the “modern” labor force and jobs (O’Brien). The migrated students that come from different cities too face horrendous bullying in school, ranging from their accents to physical features, preferences and more. This experience scars many for a long period.

Another one of the major dangers of not challenging the colonialist ideals present in Lahori elite schools could be that the students may internalize the Euro-centric notions of their own land, culture, and people, which could lead to ‘otherization’. One of the examples of contemporary discourses about the Orient includes culturally stereotyping them with relation to “Islamic Terror,” as painfully argued by Samuel Huntington in his novel *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. This us/them division is rooted in the binaries of a civilized versus a barbaric, which is similar to what the colonial education sought to propagate. Albeit it may be argued that Lahori elite schools do not propagate such extreme views, but it must be remembered that the values upheld by such institutions do lead the students to internalize and embody a certain kind of separation from people who belong to a different class, race, or even at times, gender. A fitting example of this can be how the community service clubs in these schools donate to Khwajasiras and help them in various ways, but these schools never enroll them, considering them to be an ‘other’. This allows them to maintain a ‘distance’ from the ‘them’.

Moreover, it is not a shocking fact that many of the prominent Pakistani politicians from mainstream parties, including Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf, Pakistan People’s Party, and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, come from such elite backgrounds. A closer look at the background of these members reveals that they have gone to the same kind of private elite schools, clubs, universities, and have similar cultural capitals. It appears that because of the same sheltered upbringing, most politicians are unaware of the brutal realities of the working class and poor people and seem to be largely indifferent about it (Nadim).

Elite education has played a significant role in enabling such a mindset where leaders governing the people are unaware of their actual problems, and many even have little regard for their people. This discriminatory role played by education acquires many of its core features from colonial times, as already evidenced above using the texts by Said and Foucault. Many have also argued the link of education with a new form of imperialism by hegemonic groups whereby the Euro-centric views of 'discipline' not only lead to the perpetuation of colonialist ideology, but also extend it to the "colonization of the mind" (Tikly).

It is essential to point out the problem with purely using models and theories of Western philosophy to study the Global South, particularly the post-colonial countries whose socio-political landscape was and is drastically different and calls for indigenous ways of understanding their own space. This problem of universalizing the Western notions and their canons and equating them to represent all thoughts and intellects is only a testament to the power of imperialism, or an idea called "coloniality of knowledge" (Grosfoguel). This pattern is rife in Lahori elite schools. However, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argued in his essay *On the Abolition of the English Department*, "Just because for reasons of political expediency we have kept English as our official language, there is no need to substantiate a study of English culture for our own." This means that our own traditions, culture, languages, practices, beliefs need to be at the center and not at the periphery, and it can happen all while English stays as one of the official languages of the country. Hence, this paper is not postulating to completely 'cancel' modern education of O and A Levels or IB, or the MUN circuit, all this paper does is to point out the problems associated with such a culture, and this quotation by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o helps understand that

these policies and values may exist, but should not be given priority over the local traditions, values, and beliefs.

The current Pakistani government presented the Single National Curriculum and faced a loud backlash because the curriculum privileged certain groups over others and assumed its students to be a monolith. The first step of solving the issue is to recognize that it exists. There have been many efforts to acknowledge the burdensome legacy left by colonization in many other post-colonial countries, and institutions; for instance, many realized the insignificant number of non-European intellectuals in the *School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)* and started the 'Decolonizing SOAS' campaign. Another such instance was the 'Rhodes Must Fall' Campaign that called for decolonization of education in the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Perhaps, we too can take small steps to decolonize our education system, and ourselves.

The colonialist ideology perpetuated by Lahori elite schools can be understood best by studying post-colonial works of Fanon, Said and Thiong'o who all expand on the problems and the nuances involved with the continuation of such an ideology. The major problem is that this ideology translates into action and has real tangible consequences that cannot be ignored, and it is high time that we realize the hotspots for the carriers of such ideology, with Lahori elite schools only being one of them. The first step should be to recognize the issue, and Pakistan is still far behind in acknowledging the baggage left by the colonizers. In such times, it must be remembered that our rich South Asian history stands testament that this land has always had such spaces in different times where different groups lived together in harmony, while respecting their differences. Evidence from the Sufi and the Bhakti movements shows the capacity present in this

land for tolerance, love and intellect. The Walled city of Lahore has been a melting pot of intellect, and has a history of harboring all types of people, hence of all the places, Lahore needs to decolonize educationally to understand its true potential.

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