



reflections

Literacy and Human Development: Exaggerated Linkage and Flow in Mahbub ul Haq's Report

by Fazlul Alam

MOST international development organisations since adopting the paradigm Human Development have been trying to find ways and means to accomplish the same. The shift towards Human Development and later Sustainable Human Development from "Development" has been advocated since the mid '90s. Projects which are expected to contribute to human development and its incidental Poverty Alleviation are bound to be looked sympathetically by donors.

Mahbub ul Haq, an economist of Pakistan is above such petty exercise of setting a project based NGO. Instead, he has grandly set up his own Human Development Centre to help the government policy makers and NGOs in Pakistan and possibly elsewhere. His second report entitled Human Development in South Asia 1998, has the same title as its predecessor except the year. The present one is bolder, more ambitious and it offers a formula based on a simple observation that higher the literacy rate, human development including increase of social benefits, improvement of standard of hygiene, reduction in infant and child mortality rates, decline in population growth rates, increase in labour productivity, rise in civic consciousness, greater political empowerment and democratisation, and of course poverty eradication should roll on automatically. He has quoted from Adam Smith to Amartya Sen not forgetting even Frederick Engels (page 24).

Mahbub ul Haq's prescription is very simple: improve literacy rate now and see the miracle of human development happening in South Asia. To achieve this objective, he has prescribed detailed planning and financial arrangement for the fastest spread of literacy. He is not going to accept that financial resources could alone make it, but what more will be required is a firm political commitment (page 3).

In fact, reading the Report is like listening to a well endowed preacher with whom you cannot disagree. You get entangled with his bold and positive statements, data, statistics, diagrams, charts and what not, and start believing that all development projects should

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now be abandoned by the donors, and all efforts, both in the formal and non-formal sectors should be directed towards the spread of literacy. To this objective, nothing else matters. Concrete realities like colonial legacy, mountainous national debts and deficit and burdensome loans, ideologies of the bourgeoisie, production, distribution and consumption systems, lack of capital and all other theoretical and empirical bits become useless to him.

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The conceptual framework of the Report is as follows: South Asia is one of the poorest as well as the "most illiterate region in the world". The causal connection between the two elements of 'poverty' and 'illiteracy' is, therefore, established. Dr Haq, upon drawing only six examples (page 3) from urban India (child mortality rate is less when mothers are educated), Bangladesh (higher the education; more use of contraceptives is made), Pakistan (per capita GDP would have been higher if the school enrolment was higher like Indonesia), Nepal (agricultural output increases with higher literacy among the farmers), India (increased primary schooling increases output), and Sri Lanka (higher female literacy contributes to decline of population growth rate), concludes "thus, there is clear evidence from South Asia's own experience, backed up by the experience of other regions, that education leads to many social benefits,

including improvements of standards of hygiene, reduction in infant and child mortality rate, ... increase in labour productivity, ... [etc]" (page 3).

In other words, the causal connection between 'poverty' and 'illiteracy', according to Dr Haq travels only in one way - from illiteracy to poverty. Whether poverty leads to higher illiteracy is not explored. The easy solution is an experiment in which the onus of improving oneself, and thus contribute to improve national statistics is put on the individuals and the state is urged to undertake the experiment.

Looking at the history of the western developed world, one can always see that industrial and economic expansion did not wait for building up a literate workforce; literacy was urged after successful industrial revolution and at the juncture of restructuring of their economy. In other words, a strong economic base and a changed mode of production from agriculture to manufacturing with a wide market, ensured by colonial and other expansionist activities of these countries, existed before literacy question arose. For example, in Britain, Factory Act of 1802 provided for 3 "R's (reading, writing and Arithmetic) for the children employed in the factories. In 1833, two hour schooling of child factory workers aged 9-11 was made compulsory. It was the responsibility of the factories (though not very well adhered to). These events clearly demonstrate that factory workers were illiterate. The formal education machinery of the government and private education bodies were not involved. Of course, the education of the children of the well off families was going on unhampered for a long time. It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Education Act 1870) that compulsory primary education for all children aged 5-10 was introduced.

By the above historical example, I am not questioning the relationships

between education and human development. Surely, literacy and education are vital for any nation's total development, but I question whether these can be regarded as the basics on which development would be based. There have been other preaching in the past, viz. using human capital to improve the economy of a poor and well populated country, or reducing birth rate drastically, or micro-credit as a means of poverty eradication and thereby leading to human development, introducing NGOs and private sector operations in many basic fields which the government covered traditionally, and so on. All these have become words of bygone days and proved as failed experiments.

What then? Should we disregard Mahbub ul Haq's prescription? Development including human development fields are ripe ground for experiment, and in experiment, hypothesis (and sometimes conjecture) plays an important part. It may well be that Haq's hypothesis based on some examples of the third world countries may work, particularly when he has managed to produce many arguments based on data and statistics. He has also covered many areas that in the past could not be covered or even talked about in the past. He has mentioned how the rural to urban migration of the poorest of the poor, and inhuman living condition of the poor can trigger of social instability. In stating this, he has either reiterated (without mentioning) what Manuel Castells termed 20 years ago as 'Urban Social Movement', or taken stock in the light of the absence of present post-Soviet threat. Haq's 'education' is unequivocally market based as he writes, "Education is the key to building human capital and human capital is the vital ingredient in building a nation. Of course, ... this education must be relevant to the needs of modern societies and to the demands of the global markets ..." (p25). Is this the reason for edu-

cating all? Surely, education will increase the job opportunities, and therefore, education should be designed in job-oriented structure, but that's not the task of primary education.

Somehow, these aspects have also been taken care of, albeit in a different tone, particularly in Chapter 7 Building Technical Skills. Quoting ADB1996 and World Bank 1990 source about Bangladesh, Dr Haq has shown that only 30 per cent of students gaining vocational and technical training diploma obtained jobs in 1990, compared to 60 per cent in 1983. The same trend of higher unemployment of technically educated people is evident in the whole of South Asia. This, according to Haq, is bewildering. Dismissing as "totally misleading" a World Bank study of 1994 which states the reason for the above anomaly was low return of Technical education compared to general education (possibly meaning university education), Haq argues that technical education should be considered as more return oriented than general education, and he offers a ten point programme to do that. In this matter, he has stated that the basic education should be high in quality, "Technical and vocational skills can be developed only on a strong foundation of basic skills such as reading, writing and numeracy, and a problem solving attitude" (p.98). Did he tell us that in the matters of primary education? No, he did not. Reference to the old three Rs (with additional problem solving attitude) which were the minimum in the Factories Act of Britain much earlier is very confusing. Nevertheless, his arguments hold good for all the poor countries.

It must be accepted that in order to be constructive, Dr Haq has painstakingly detailed his proposals for action. These cover almost all the aspects, including finance, methods of teaching, teacher training, formal and informal educa-

tion, financing and political commitments, etc. of educating any third world country. What then can be the purpose of the title of this essay which suggests that the Report has exaggerated the linkage between literacy and human development?

In my view, literacy and education are two different matters (cf. Richard Hoggart's The Uses of Literacy about the early stages of industrial Britain), and that education alone cannot lead to human development (in the development jargon). There must be a well balanced system of production which will lead to the economic growth of any poor country, and this system of production should be built around the people, not for the benefit of foreign capital investment to use the 'human capital' of a poor country. Third world countries are poor simply because they have no capital base. Neither the state nor the people has the capital on which to build the macroeconomic infrastructure for growth. These countries are geared to become satellite areas (or, peripheries to use standard practice) of foreign capitals, and the system of production required by the foreign capital would invariably determine the relations of production, as it once did for the developed countries during their industrialisation.

Still, I would say Dr Haq has produced a report that should be studied in details by all concerned, and "education for all" should become the motto. In that process, we would definitely face more problems that anticipated by the report. Some of these problems are already known to us, although ADB and World Bank did not touch them. Many of us know about corrupt practices and elite control of primary schools of Bangladesh where many primary schools exist in names and where teachers never turn up, but they become fat in power and wealth by some mysterious system, and more mysteriously the authority never takes action even if officially reported. We would also need to determine what we would teach and in what medium. We would also be required to define 'development' not by eurocentric but by our criteria. The last one may become natural and automatic after the empowerment of the people by education - should the days come.

dwelling in the heart of a teenage girl violently and calmly.
I anchor on the distracted heart of a person apathetic to all.
I feel the stings and motions of the stifling cry,
oozing out of a widow's heart furiously and hopelessly
And I become mingled with sorrow nurtured by the deprived,
ever homeless pedestrians of the street so far.

Composing myself with a spurt of mental pain and poisonous pang,
ranking in the mind of the insulted people
I stir up hopes in the bosom of the humiliated.
In the working of my own affection,
I act in unison with a sensitive heart,
lumbered up with ever-enraged plaintiveness and deep pain.
Finding myself desired of a thieving kiss and the titter
springing from the first contact with a maiden,
I feel enlivened with the surprising glance of a lover
showing affection surreptitiously and her momentary feigned glance.

I am exposed to the love of a fickle minded girl,
Giving an impetus to the jangle of her bracelets and bangles.
I am ever infantile and ever adolescent,
letting my emotional spectrum
range across the brassiere of a country damsel,
shying away from the uncontrollable passion of youth.
I stem from the northern air, gentle breeze from the Malya,
wind blowing at random.
I issue from the deep melodious musical note of the people's poet
and his playing on a flute.
With a desire of greater intensity, I find myself one with
thirst, caused by the heat of summer.
The brook am I, running through oasis
mingled with the shades of green landscape.

With transcendental happiness, I move fast
pinpointing myself —
What a raving lunatic I am, I am a
raving lunatic!
of which enigmatic constituents, myself, my
inner being come to be composed,
dawned upon me today, with all my bars flung open.
I trudge through ups and downs,
Creeping into an unconscious state, yet, with a stream of
consciousness in my flat position,
I come to be the conqueror of the victorious banner of mankind,
hoisted over the universal grand outergate.

Speeding up in the likeness of a storm, I
clamorously whirl around the ridges of the
earth, heaven with the clapping of hands,
The strong and stout "Borak", and Indra's Horse,
being at my service,
I saddle them up.
And they trot at full gallop, giving a loud neigh.
I am compounded with the active volcano
bursting out from the inside of the earth's lap,
stoking up all destroying fire on doomsday.
Playing drunken pranks,
I turn wild and riotous in nature
like a turbulent ocean of fire



and raise a tumult of screams, shouts and howling in the nether
region.

Getting off to a flying start, I keep on 'winging' my way
as speedily as light and taking leaps
with the snap of my fingers.
Blowing up in the form of an abrupt tremor,
I grow violent, shaking the panic-stricken earth,

and grabbing the hood of the snake's king
and the fiery wings, of the divine messenger, Gebrail.
The divine child am I, with a
wavering disposition, oscillating between ideas
and tearing away the terrestrial-regions
audaciously with my teeth.

My call being one with the call of orpheus' flute,
The great "Indus" in a slumberous state,
with the world stilling by the sleeping kiss I blow
and sinking into oblivion
by the flourishing tune on my pipe.
My call being one with the call of Krishna's flute,
When indignantly I would fly around the firmament,
causing seven hells and "Haviah" to shudder
to an extinguishable flame,
Circulating my rebellious-message across the sky and earth.
Flooding is my art, cropping up during "Shravan"

rendering the earth fruitful sometimes
and wreaking widespread damage upon it sometimes.
I am bent upon snatching away a pair of daughters
from the bosom of Vishnu.
I am injustice, I am meteor, I am saturn.
I find myself one with a comet leaving behind a bright trail.
In all my likelihood, I am the venomous cobra with the hood
expanded on head.

I am "Chandee" wearing a garland of human heads.
I am gifted with all destroying force of "Ranada".
I keep blazing with flowery smile in the midst of hellish fire.

Myself being one with body and soul,
I am inexhaustible, immute, imperishable, indeclinable.
I have lent terror among the gods as well as mortal beings.
My science, my belongings remain ever unattained,
determining me the glory of the world's prophet — the greatest
human being.

Frenziedly and with a tuneful, rhythmic movement
of my body as well as feet,
I keep veering round the heaven, earth, city of infernal regions.
What a raving Lunatic I am, what a raving Lunatic I am!
of which enigmatic constituents, myself, my inner being
Come to be composed
dawned upon me today, with all my bars flung open.
Armed with the gigantic heavy axe of Parshurama,
I will cleanse the earth of the war-like
demonic race, Khatriyas,
keeping it at peace

well-equipped with "Balrama's" plough
as was placed over his shoulder
I will crash into the suppressed domain with an
Irrepressible outburst of joy ensuing from the flourishing newlity.

The great rebel remains in a tedious state of battlemanship,
I will leap into suspended animation armistically,
as the concave sky, air will no longer
be pervaded by the replication of the crying tone of the oppressed
and the battle ground of Bhima will not resound
with great peals of the clink and fall of the swords
and scimitar of the oppressor.

The rebellious "Vrighoo" am I,
imprinting God's bosom with the marks of my footsteps.
I am God's offspring, swearing an oath
to dismember the breast of the whimsical supreme being, "Vishnu"

in my grudgeful, shocking, mentally unhinged conditions.

I am the rebellious Vrighoo,
imprinting God's bosom with the marks of my footsteps
and dismembering the breast of the whimsical, supreme being.
Claiming my rank with the eternal rebellious hero,
I outtop the universe alone
with my head pointing straight upward timelessly.

Shadows Over Our World by Aneeka Malik

A shadow crept over our world
it was never so great before

It is no longer the shadow of peace and universality
passed over the earth when the sun's light is gone.

Now the shadows are black and scary
with the loss of any warmth or light in our mind.

The shadows no longer that of a full magical moon
Sailing on by forever earth's lifetime.

Now the shadows are dark and hard
no circles eternal of love, friendship, trust.

It's not ever the soft shadows of clouds
that promise rain and greenery, life rich and wondrous.

The shadow is of harshness and cold death
with mankind's conscience violence and uncaring sins.

The shadows over our world
it never could so sadden or confuse me before.