

Education in Baluchistan: by the Girls, for the Girls

Mrs. Hafiza Ghafoor

I think I was born to serve education in general and be a pioneer for girls' education in Balochistan. A simple B.A B.Ed, I have been in the field of education since 1977 in challenging districts such as Kharan and Gwadar. I think I am an ordinary person born to do some extra ordinary things

From 1977-1997 I was appointed as the head in Kharan Girls High School with only three teachers and very few students . I worked day and night to turn it around, teaching all subjects, even where I was most unqualified. In the process I was setting an example for others to follow. The school became a model school and enrolments multiplied.

Then one day in 1997my husband was posted to Gwadar district. I had no choice but to move. My work here was done.

Gwadar in those days was hot, dusty, sandy and bleak, without any amenities of electricity or water but blessed with the ocean and ocean front where we sat and waded to cool ourselves off in the evenings. I was sent as a head to the Government. Girls High School Gwadar with an enrolment of 250 students from grades Katchi to matric, a handful of teachers who did not go to their classrooms. They did not want to teach; they chatted and sat around but the classrooms with students remained largely abandoned. I was in a state of shock! I thought Oh God this is 'Kharan story' all over again and perhaps worse.

I knew immediately that I had to turn this situation around by example and not just chiding my colleagues from a position of authority.

The situation was so bad because the teachers only taught in Balochi, not in Urdu and certainly not in English at all! This was going to be an uphill task. As a head-teacher I gathered

my thoughts and strategized to spend all my time with the students from one class to the next. First the teachers ignored my actions, but very quickly one by one they returned to their classrooms where they belonged and watched me execute a lesson. I have already said that I am a B.A B.Ed and have not had a chance to upgrade my qualifications so again it made me feel inadequate but I had no choice. Each teacher watched me carefully, how I began a subject/topic how I prepared a lesson plan, how I completed the session. Each day the teachers' improved their engagement and gained confidence ...until one by one they came up to me to say, "Madam we can now teach ourselves".

The teachers realized that I am their supporter and I am there to change the school for the better. The students responded positively as finally they could say that we have a school with teachers and teaching! Some thought this is an Urdu medium school (and not just a Baluchi school), some thought that English is taught here better than in most so- called 'English medium' schools; some parents thought the standard of Arabic teaching is also wonderful. The school became truly multi-lingual!

Once the teachers were in the classrooms I could begin to work on the development schemes for the school, announce new posts for the secondary level, arrange transport for teachers, and generally do some justice to education in the remote areas of Pakistan.

Today the school boasts of 1130 students! We have new classrooms; 12 computers (but still no computer teachers).

In 2003 I was struck with a profound personal tragedy losing my life partner and my daughter in a terrible accident. The school, teachers and the students became my healers. I lifted myself re-connecting to life in the most meaningful manner.

In 2002 I had begun to prepare for my succession as I had done earlier, but was determined to do a better job and began training Ms. Shahnaz, the current head-teacher of the school. She was an excellent colleague. I urged her to work hard at upgrading her qualifications and to learn all the relevant skills. She did her M.A . M.Ed. She was sent for a four month course to USA with USAID /AED support. She is a wonderful learner. There are three more teachers whom we trained to become school leaders and managers. If we are to succeed we need a winning team, not dynamic individuals working in isolation from each other. My winning team is all set to take over and I am proud of them.

In 2007 I was posted out and became the first proper Deputy DEO (District Education Officer) who was Female for Gwadar. Now my job is to change the culture and atmosphere and working of the EDO's (Executive District Officer) office! My qualifications are in the way of my being promoted properly as I am in BPS (Grade) 17 only where as I ought to be going on to BPS (Grade) 20! I wish experience, skills and wisdom could be considered equivalent to a university degree!

But I can live with this. My students and teachers are my best reward; the parents appreciate my role in transforming the lives of their daughters as Gwadar prepares for an economic and social transformation.

What more could I have been born to do?

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