

Dropout Falls And More Girls Come To School

Rafiqul Islam Montu

SUJON and Sukhi are brother and sister. Sukhi is older, aged six, Sujon is aged five. They are studying in a school under Compulsory Primary Education Programme. Last January the two were enrolled in Charcolony Government Primary School, in Barguna, in the deep south coastal region of the country.

The parents of Sujon and Sukhi are both working. The father works in the field and the mother works as an attendant in different households. With their hard-earned, meagre income it has been an excruciating struggle for them to enrol their two children in school. Both of them no doubt keenly felt that their children should receive education. They would say, "we have enrolled them in school through hard struggle so that they may enjoy a happier life and may not have to earn their living through manual labour like us." This interest shown by Sujon and Sukhi's parents proves that even destitutes have an awareness of the importance of education.

An assistant teacher of Charcolony Government School said, "Sujon and Sukhi are quite attentive to their studies. They come to school on time and so the teachers take a special interest in them."

Following the example of Sujon and Sukhi, the other children of the neighbourhood — Sumon, Shafi, Babul, Chaina, Parul — have all got enrolled in school. Their parents follow different kinds of vocations.

They are porters at the launch ghat, rickshaw-drivers, day labourers landless peasants. They all live in a ghetto close to the Barguna Town Hall. About half the children of this slum could not yet be brought under compulsory primary education programme. The functionaries of the education programme say that they tried to enrol all these children in school according to the target but they ascribed their failure to lack of awareness of the guardians.

Rahim Mia of this ghetto has two sons aged six and seven. He did not get them admitted into school. In his words, "It is not our lot to lead comfortable life. We will have to live in the ghetto. What good will it do to spend money for giving education to children."

Joinal of the same ghetto has a seven-year old daughter. She is still a stranger to schooling. She works with her mother at a construction site. Joinal said, "It is far better to work than to go to school. In our situation education has no relevance."

A member of a thana-level primary education committee said, "It is not always possible to enforce the laws enacted by the government for promoting compulsory primary education."

A Ward level member of the committee said, "Many guardians find it more profitable to send their children to work than to send them to school. They think that if children work, it can in some way prove gainful for the family. But there are exceptions, like Margina and Opu."

Margina gets up everyday early in the morning, with the first lark. As soon as the sun has risen, she gets busy. She has to go to school, accompanied by Opu, her friend next-door. Margina says, "I will receive education and raise my status. Then people will not look down upon me." They are both aged seven years.

Margina's father is a day-labourer. He leaves home early in the morning to earn his daily wages. They live in village Chalitali in Barguna Sadar thana. They possess nothing except a house on a small piece of land. Margina was feeding her chickens in front of her straw-roofed house. She was dressed in black pyjamas and tunic and her hairs were dishevelled. It seems her clothes were given no washing for a long time. Nearby was Margina's mother doing household work. Her father was away.

Margina said, "Seeing Opu of the house next-door going to school, I too told father that I would go to

school. Father scolded me at first but later did not object to my going to school. I like my school. My teachers have given me my books. I will receive education become great."

Besides Margina and her friend Opu, many children of this village who used to do household work are now going to school. Under Compulsory Primary Education Programme, effort is being made to enable all children of school-going age to attend school.

The Primary Education Officer of Barguna District said in 1991, 73 per cent students were retained till the end of the year. But in 1992 after Compulsory Primary Education was implemented, about 80 per cent students could be refrained. He hopes that in 1993 also a high proportion of students will stick. And the rate of attendance of girls is very high this year.

Despite endless problems, guardians are becoming aware of the need of educating their children and children are also feeling enthusiastic about going to school. "In order that they may not drop out, those concerned with compulsory primary education will have to be more vigilant. Then we can enroll more girls to school like Margina and Opu," said the District Primary Education Officer.

— Development Features

The writer is a correspondent of UNB, Barguna.