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Quality Of Education In The English Medium Schools

Shahnaz Kibriya

HAVE you ever tried to look back at the past years of your life and ask yourself as to which part of your life has been the best. Well, if somebody puts this question to me I would certainly say that the best part of my life was my school life. I am in my mid-career but still I can distinctly remember the wonderful, happy days I spent in the Convent School. Even today if I close my eyes I can have a vivid imagination of the whole picture—the beautiful gate, the lush green lawn surrounded by equally green hedges, the spacious and decorated classrooms, and above all the affection of the teachers will always remain evergreen in my memory. These memories create such emotions in me that even at this age (I have a college going son) I wish I could go back to those days. I would not hesitate to confess that when I took admission in the Convent school I was a student of Grade One and I used to stare enviously at the kindergarten children playing with wonderful toys, especially I won't forget the sight of the pretty dolls (I had not seen such nice dolls in my life before) and the tricycles, it seemed to be some sort of a Disneyland. It is all a sweet memory and a pleasant dream of my life and perhaps the dream of thousands of children studying in the kindergartens of Bangladesh. Everyday when we open the newspapers we get concerned when we see the news of violence in the campus and pray for proper education in a healthy atmosphere. But has anybody thought about the atmosphere and standard of education in the English Medium Schools? Given the true picture, one would be horrified at the things going on there.

What would one expect from the education given in a college or university in a country where the education given in the kindergartens, supposed to form the base of one's life, is only a bunkum or a hoax. With the exception of a few established English Medium Schools of the city all the rest are fooling the poor guardians, keeping them in the dark, and playing a very deadly game with the future of thousands of children.

From my personal experience I would narrate a small but unpleasant incident. When my son was studying in Class One in one of these 'so-called' English Medium schools (I am sparing the name) I noticed that the simple exercises he was doing in his English Grammar were full of

mistakes. I corrected these mistakes and humbly approached the teacher and said, "Madam, I think you were in a hurry and did not notice that my son has got these answers wrong," although I knew that the teacher herself did not know the right answer because it was simply impossible to have overlooked the mistakes everyday. The teacher instead of being grateful and ashamed became very much hostile and started taking out her temper on my son. She even went to the extent of using abusive language about me in front of my son, which I came to know later on. Naturally at the tender age of seven, after days of humiliation and victimization, my son could not take it anymore, he protested and said that he would not go to school anymore. When asked for an explanation, with tears rolling down from his eyes he said, "Mother, the teacher does not love me and does not only scold me but she even abuses you in front of all the children and says why do you come to school? Why don't you stay at home and take lessons from your mother?" Now this had happened a long time back and to save my son from further victimization I withdrew him from that school in the middle of the year and could fortunately get him admitted in one of the reputed Bangla Medium Schools of the city from where he completed his SSC this year obtaining star marks with six letters. I have forgotten the malice I had held against that teacher, on the contrary now I consider that incident to be a blessing, but I would like to draw the attention of the guardians whose children are perhaps undergoing days of humiliation by the untrained, unskilled and underqualified teachers.

The children of today shudder at the thought of their teachers and go to school most unwillingly. A day off from school is a celebration for them. A day off means no admonitions from the teachers and no homeworks. Their lives have become miserable as they have no time for play. A niece of mine lost all interest in her studies and was getting mentally unbalanced because of the pressure of studies when she was in one of these kindergartens. Then, while it was not too late, her mother shifted her to a Bengali Medium School and after

completing her SSC and HSC from the same school she is now in America studying computer science. She is getting an assistantship as well because of her good performance in studies. Now coming back to the point the only criteria to get a job in the English medium schools is if one can converse in English and that also with an artificial accent showing as though that person is not well conversant with Bangla being a Bangladeshi, this is the biggest criteria indeed! You ask this same person to write a paragraph on the easiest possible subject you can be rest assured not to find a single correct sentence of English. The other day one of my neighbours, who has been a housewife for the last 20 years told me with a beaming smile that now she was also a serving woman. On asking she said that very recently she had been employed in an English medium school of the city. I do not know anything about her educational qualifications because whenever this question came she would say blushing, "I got married at a very young age and then had to take care of my children and husband so I could not carry on my college education."

I hope you can make a wild guess about her qualifications! Of course one great qualification she has is that she goes abroad very frequently with her husband (he is a rich businessman) and in our common people's concept "is very smart" and can converse in English. Now she is working as a teacher in an English medium school. Of course I forgot to mention that once she came to me to seek my help to write a letter in English to her husband, when he was abroad, just to boast to him about her proficiency in English. Dear readers, can you imagine the future of her students? Again there are teachers who have appeared for their 'O' level examination and are eternally awaiting the results (if the result is bad they need not talk of it to anyone as it is not published anywhere there is no means of finding out the genuine news, it can be procured only from the British Council). Neither do they have the qualifications nor do they have any experience but they are teaching quite confidently in some of the kindergar-

tens of the city. I would call it a complete anarchy because on one side the young teenager is unable to continue studies considering the job or rather a substantial amount of money at the end of the month more worthwhile, on the other side the students are also not getting what they should get from the teacher because at such an age the young teachers' interest lie in various other things than in the tedious task of teaching kindergarten children.

Last weekend I went to spend a day at my friend's house. Our daughters are of the same age. Let aside spending even half the day, after only two hours my daughter pretty much bored insisted on going home because Fauzia, my friend's daughter, wouldn't give her company. Finding no other alternative I left my daughter in the company of the blessed TV programmes for the rest of the day since Fauzia had to get prepared for four class tests on Sunday, moreover she had to take lessons first from her English teacher, then from her Maths teacher and finally my friend (giving no heed to my presence) sat with her for the rest of the endless list of subjects. This is life for Fauzia or perhaps thousands of other children of English medium schools on a weekend. The whole household remains tensed up, because a child is studying, do you think it was like that in our good old days of schooling? Would you call it schooling? I would call it a curse. Weekends are for mental relaxation of the children, so that after full diversion during that period they are rejuvenated with full energy and vigour to cope with the coming week. What do we see now? They are bogged down with homeworks and have no time for relaxation even during weekends. Isn't this a mental and physical torture, and after a prolonged cycle of the same, they lose their interest in studies and at times life turns out to be a liability for them at this tender age.

I believe this situation is not at all pleasant nor is it anywhere near to the expectations of the parents, but it is a tragedy that they have nothing to do or say anything against the school authorities as they and their children remain hostages in the hands of the teachers. Why the guardians do not have any alternative will be discussed in the next issue, with some more problems and some recommendations.