

Educating The Masses

Our education system incorporates inadequacies we have not yet succeeded in eradicating from the set-up which was handed down to us from an outdated regime and now woefully inadequate for any developing country hoping to find a place in a modern world.

With the admittedly slow awakening among the general masses of the need for education nevertheless the nation must be prepared to accommodate these demands and provide education to all no matter the financial cost. What widespread education really means can best be demonstrated by taking a close look at the figures. Out of the present population of 114 million, 46% are children below the age of fourteen years. About half are under-school going age and need not be taken into consideration at this stage but they represent the growing student body of the future. Of the 32 million school age children, about 14 million belong to the primary school age group and if claims of 84% enrollment is true this still leaves 3 million children, most of them girls, outside the system a formidable enough figure to warrant the attention of a government mindful of its moral responsibility to future generations.

The fact that the rate of literacy has not improved much over the years is mute evidence of the failure of the present system to fulfil the needs of the nation for many will drop out before completing their schooling. The perpetuation of the learning by 'rote' method and the academic bias has made eradication of the defects within the system difficult and precludes the nurturing of an enquiring mind, the essence of all real learning.

Efforts to reform the present education system has already been taken up with the help and support of the international community who have combined themselves in an attempt to wipe out the curse of illiteracy from the face of the globe but the obstacles are still formidable. In Bangladesh alone 100,000 new class rooms will be needed over the first five years of a compulsory educational scheme and existing ones have to be maintained.

There is also a great need for trained teachers beginning from a shortage of suitable candidates to an inadequate and inefficient infra-structure. The need for inducting more women is being frustrated by the inappropriate facilities, however international efforts are committed to improving teacher training facilities as well as to improving the quality of education in the existing institutions at all levels but most particularly at the primary school level.

Up to now expenditure in this sector has been one of the lowest in the world and if improvements both qualitatively and quantitatively are to be made this amount must be increased to at least that of most other developing nations who spend 3.5% of their GDPs. The 1.7% we spend seems woefully inadequate in comparison and although there are plans to increase this amount it will take considerable time to reach a reasonable pattern of expenditure. Curricula reform has been much talked about and is now way overdue and a greater effort must be made to introduce a curriculum suited to the needs of a largely rural populace. The inability of the ordinary people to identify education to their own needs has been largely responsible for the huge number of drop-outs.

Many of the inequalities to be found between rural and urban based institutions have their roots lying deep within the social system. Permitting this situation to continue unbridled is one unjustified for a country set to embark on educational reform and compulsory education but its eradication will take time especially in view of the persistent economic differences which prevail. To help eradicate these inequalities in income and social status a more scientific based form of education to which the people can relate to their day existence would perhaps be pertinent at the same time, particularly those subjects dealing

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73