

67

Status Of Bangla In English Medium Schools

Nazma Yeasmeen Haque

OMPARED to our concern on the kind of English that is being taught in schools in Bangla medium, the reverse, that is, finding out and determining the quality and standard of Bangla in English medium schools has remained rather unexplored. This should neither make one complacent that all is well with Bangla in such institutions nor the fact that Bangla being the mother tongue of large majority should simply obviate the necessity of probing into its present status in English medium schools. To an unenquiring mind, however, the problems of teaching and learning Bangla in an English medium school may often surface as incidental to the process of education as a whole that will have occurred in cases of other subjects as well, but to someone genuinely concerned, it is a problem much deeper than is perceived. With the proliferation of schools in English medium within a relatively short period of time and also driven by an urge of making them as alluring as possible, it is not unlikely to lose sight of the matrix of a sound curriculum and its corresponding time-table whereby Bangla may become a casualty.

A close look at the conglomeration of facts such as a sociocultural milieu that is characterized by a strong tie with its root and language, prevalence of ESL (English as a second language), felt need for proficiency in English for better prospect in life, a general craze for learning some English as a symbol of social status and ingress and egress of English in the curricula at different levels of education at different times concomitantly affecting the role and therefore, actual status of Bangla have undoubtedly given rise to a dilemma big enough in operating schools in English medium in terms of both the quantity and quality of teaching the mother tongue. The aim of teaching Bangla also remains blurred compared to other subjects when necessity of mother tongue in the curricular hierarchy is not made explicit in the society. Therefore, the role of mother tongue notwithstanding, it is

reduced to only one subject occupying a back seat in schools that teach in English. An argument often used that Bangla as one of many subjects in such schools is allocated its time and space proportionately, although tenable, nevertheless, the importance that is attached to it, the seriousness with which Bangla is taught and learnt are yet to be seen in its tangibility. A student in an English medium school pretty soon discovers not only the relatively less importance of Bangla compared to other subjects but also the worse when he tends to construct an English versus Bangla situation in his perception that eventually shapes his attitude of dislodging Bangla at every possible opportunity. It is a commonplace that as a student comes to study in an English medium school he starts off with a set image of such schools mostly influenced by his parents—an image that tends to distance him from others in the society at large. A facade of 'being different' insulates him so much that merits of learning Bangla let alone excelling in it become least or no concern. In this backdrop, it is not surprising to hear students and also some adults with background of education in English that they are not good in Bangla as if had that been in the affirmative, that would have been lowering themselves. Therefore, strange as it be, the mother tongue of overwhelming majority of students is alienated from the mother tongue of overwhelming majority of students is alienated from the students' priority in the curriculum.

By virtue of such alienation on the one hand and a kind of affinity induced by the language used for medium of instruction on the other, a third culture is woven haphazardly with which the students both unwittingly and unwittingly identify themselves. What is deleterious more in such a situation is being unaware of the values of Bangla as one's own language, the process of alienation moves in a circuitous way ending in an almost total oblivion of one's

culture and heritage. Youngsters in English medium school, being overwhelmed by 'Englishness' fail to see English—Bangla as co-ordinates; an interface between the two languages remain unfelt which to a large extent is the failure of the schools themselves.

Culture blindness gets accelerated as more and more students incline to believe that, since Bangla is a mundane subject, working hard or doing well in Bangla in schools is pretty unfashionable. This definitely portends a worse situation when a student's perception however wrongly formed it may be, is echoed by parents. Speaking practically, in an era that has been witnessing explosion of information at a faster rate than ever, learning has assumed a truncated nature for the sake of acquisition of knowledge within a relatively shorter period of time superimposing artificialities over a normal pace of learning that calls for engaging more time, perseverance and internalization of learned materials for the purpose of applying them at the appropriate time and situation that broadly includes necessity of such a learning in one's personal development as well. Keeping Bangla at a distance in an English medium school on such grounds that it is a difficult subject, not useful in higher studies, O' Level Bangla and the type of Bangla that is taught in schools are, discrepant etc. merit careful consideration. At the outset, the school authorities, parents, guardians and students must appreciate the point that there cannot be any concession regarding learning Bangla not only by our students but also those who are not Bangla speaking and not nationals of Bangladesh. The true spirit of patriotism must always be there at the heart of a sound philosophy of education. Taking pride in not knowing Bangla must be shed as false and self-deprecating. Also a student's apathy towards learning Bangla accrues largely from the way it is taught in such schools. For motivating students already en-

capsulated in their mind set, the stereotyped method of teaching must be modified to make Bangla interesting particularly the age-old cumbersome approach to teaching the language itself. Modernization of Bangla that has simplified its use can very well serve as key tool in the hands of a teacher.

In keeping with the characteristics of an English medium school, teachers of Bangla should ideally have a moderate command of spoken English that supposedly will impress the young students thereby avoiding delineating a teacher of Bangla and the subject itself as of minor importance.

Certain aspects of schooling are thus needed to be geared to the psychology of youngsters of today to turn a learning situation into most favourable. To emphasize the necessity of learning Bangla, a continuous process of evaluation can be adopted round the year including excellence in co-curricular activities in it. Encouraging students to do well in both the languages has to be pursued consistently and such effort must be rewarded tangibly. As far as language learning is concerned, a good student should strive for learning both Bangla and English equally well—a task that lies primarily with the teachers concerned who can safely demonstrate that no interference or hindrance can take place in such a process. As an examination authority, University of London should revise content of O'level Bangla Language to make it more comprehensive and also make literature in mother tongue a compulsory subject for overseas students at the same time. This once made mandatory, a great service will be done to give a thrust to learning one's mother tongue seriously in English medium schools. And that will be the hallmark of a good institution in English medium where Bangla will occupy a prestigious place as mother tongue and where students will be imbued with an urge of learning Bangla better.