

# Education—The Foundation Of Human Development

Dr. M. Zakir Hussain

**T**O deny education to anyone is a sin. It is a sin against humanity. It may be a rather strong indictment of societies that neglect to educate their peoples. But by leaving a large segment of its population — particularly its child population — illiterate and uneducated, a society literally forfeits human development (a key to all development), and thereby its future. It is no surprise that countries with low educational achievement are usually backward in socio-economic development. Many emerging democracies remain particularly vulnerable when they have large populations devoid of education. Conversely, countries with high literacy and skilled human resources attain high level of social development and quality of life even with modest national incomes. Contemporary global experience confirms that if there is one indicator which measures the level and quality of development, it is education of people. Education is a very strong impetus to achievement of other social and economic indicators, and one important precondition of stable, accountable and just civil society — all of which enhance national development and quality of life.

## Retrospect

In retrospect, the twentieth century was a period of scientific, industrial and agricultural growth with a vast expansion of commerce and consumerism. But the twenty-first century will largely be the post-industrial era dominated by information and intelligence, by innovation, by sophisticated market application of scientific and technology breakthrough. It will give great momentum and predominance to service industry. There will be a high demand for educated, creative, and intelligent population. Only those societies who value and nurture education will prosper while those who do not will slide backwards and regress.

## Prospect

Education of tomorrow will, therefore, prepare the person to know which information to seek and how and where to find it. Verification and validation of information, interpretation of events, access to knowledge and its application will be needed. The coming century will be one of exercise of mind and not of muscle. High productivity with high value added industry will be a function of rapid and intelligence use of knowledge and information of which there is already an avalanche with much more to follow.

An educated mind will be able to quickly assimilate a large

body of information and effectively use knowledge and information in a creative manner. An educated mind will show high intellectual energy. Clearly, therefore, real education of the future will be much more than memorising and recalling prescribed facts and formulae. Access to and screening of information are already becoming highly prized, and education will help develop that ability. Real education will be increasingly a learning process than a cramming exercise; and the learning process will have to continue as a life-long endeavour. It will help clarify rather than confuse or conceal will tear away the cobweb and remove the darkness of all forms of orthodoxy and bigotry, will remove stagnation and embrace fresh ideas, discipline the mind to reason and use of logic to verify and create new knowledge, to reject the redundant. Education of the coming century will take virtually a quantum leap. Only those who seize the immense opportunity looming ahead will succeed and survive in the very unforgiving and competitive world of tomorrow. All of this should be a warning to societies that continue to neglect education of their population, particularly education of children.

## Bangladesh Context

The literacy rate of Bangladesh population is less than 50%. In more than 26 years since independence, the country's literacy has not risen significantly. Of greater concern is the even lower rate of female literacy. Attainment of full literacy seems a distant goal if the status quo continues. It is doubtful if government investment alone will achieve full literacy. Private and voluntary sector must rapidly invest. While quantity is important, quality of education is even more so. The contents, package, and method of delivery of education must be integrated into a coherent whole which is sadly not the case at present. Overall, there are two main streams of education — one for the affluent class and the other for the poor and under privileged class. Also, one that is "modern and secular" and the other that is "religious." Thus there is a dichotomy in education then again, expensive private schools for some provides "world class" education while low quality education in the norm in ordinary schools for the vast majority. This not only creates a divide between the elites and the ordinary people but also denies the majority good education. There is nagging ambivalence about the content and purpose of education. This is not to suggest the same syllabus for all

but to demand all educational opportunities to be widely accessible and of minimum quality and standard in the way it is delivered.

Education is not a matter of pressing a variety of informa-

tion into the head of the student. Education is really a training of the mind to learn how to learn, and do so continuously. Good education cannot remain the opportunity and privilege of some; it should be the national agenda to disseminate education of acceptable standards in all schools be these in the private or the public or voluntary sector. There is a notion that mere raising investment in the sector will do the job. It will not, unless the basic foundation of what education and why and how of education is secure.

We have a huge backlog and must do many things concurrently. We must accelerate quantitative increase of literacy; articulate and adopt a credible, consistent, and modern secular education that is accessible to all. We have to improve the quality and style of delivering education as a tool, for improving the mind; make education relevant to life and living, foster mental development, creativity, intelligence and innovation.

To do all of this is a monumental task. But not to do is suicidal. The single crucial investment in the national development agenda would be build education on the strongest foundation with no equivocation as to the content and purpose; to nurture intelligent minds that continue to learn life long and know how to learn. That will be the best investment the nation can make. It is rather tragic that we seem to be faltering in deciding on a modern, secular and a uniform national education agenda. We seem to be trapped in equivocation or resigned to inertia and paralytic status quo. By default, we seem to be creating dichotomy and dividing the nation into "elites" and the deprived (of education). Attempts to accommodate very divergent pulls and pressures still abound. Too much energy is spent in pulling backwards and remaining glued to yesterday's cliches and rhetoric often divorced from the present reality or future needs.

In the present context of Bangladesh, there is so little time to do so much with resources so modest. We can hardly afford to fritter away any of these. We need a virtual revolution in education in the country if we are to remove the backlog, and seize the opportunities that lie ahead of our young generation. The modern state has the primary duty and responsibility

to provide a sound framework of modern education; establish clear purpose, content, method, and outcome; facilitate single-minded pursuit of education so that the society can inherit abundant enterprising and able human capital — its single most precious asset.

## Evidence is there, now courage is needed

There is enough evidence of how nations with high literacy and quality education have achieved rapid social and economic development; some have achieved indicators of quality of life comparable to far richer countries. Mere wealth without investment in human capital did not raise the standard of life. An educated society is a strong force to bring discipline and distributive justice in democratic governance of the state. In many poor countries, there is often an undue haste to pursue economic growth and little investment in education. South Korea, Taiwan could not have enjoyed the rapid economic transformation in the past decades without investment in educated and highly skilled work force. Sri Lanka would not enjoy the quality of life it has even without high national income unless it invested heavily in educating its people and pursued social policies favouring distributive justice irrespective of political changes. The State of Kerala in India does not boast of high income but does enjoy the best quality of life in India.

We are proud of our language; we made supreme sacrifice to uphold the right of our language. We made even greater sacrifices to achieve independence. We are emotionally charged as we celebrate the anniversary of our historic language movement, and national independence. Few other people had to make such supreme sacrifices in recent history. Yet, at the dawn of the twenty-first century the most appropriate celebration of our independence and our language movement would have been a national declaration and commitment to achieve full literacy, to make education truly secular, rational, scientific; to make education improve and enlighten the mind, so that universal education becomes an instrument of social and economic advancement, a driving force for unleashing the creative energy and ingenuity of our people.

We need courage blended with pragmatism since surely the coming century belongs to the enterprising and innovative, the realist and the intelligent. For all those, we need an educated mind. We need to move forward rather than seek comfort and live in the past.