

Seriously Speaking

Do Degrees Measure Our Education?

Omar Husain

*"A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring..."*

We have seen the best of the worst behaviour of our lawmakers, including, unfortunately, our prime minister. I had hopes in her that she would proudly and aptly and ably carry the standard of her father and our great leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. But disappointment in politicians is not the first time that we had faced and won't be the last time either. Badruddoza, perhaps, would not have the opportunity to commit political suicide had not the question of Begum Zia's extent of formal education came up. But that too is not a good excuse. Mr. Doza perhaps forgot Salman Rushdie or our very own Taslima Nasrin.

And of all the great persons who did not have any formal education, that he had to choose an example which would have been best if left alone, showed his colossal lack of good and sound judgment. John Lennon of the famous English band The Beatles also said something that he regretted later. In the late sixties, he said that the band, Beatles was more popular than Jesus Christ. A wave of protest surged all over the world, their records were burnt publicly, and the gradual disintegration of their band started then and eventually the Beatles were no more! Lennon may have been right as far as popularity goes, but his lack of judgement in saying so proved disastrous.

Personally, I feel everyone should leave the subject of religion alone and leave it with those who know what they are talking about. Alexander Pope said it in the above couplet well.

How does 'education' differ from 'formal education'? If a person does not have a college degree, is he uneducated? Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the philosophers of ancient India had no M.A. or B.A. degree. So are they to be classified as uneducated? There are hundreds of great personalities of the past and the present who do not have any record of going to college to earn a degree, yet they have left their mark on human history. If this simple fact escaped our law mak-

ers, then it proves who are really uneducated. I cannot recall who said, "Common sense is not so common," but I do recall what the great French mathematician Renee Descartes said about common sense, and I quote him: "Common sense is the most widely distributed commodity in the world, for everyone thinks himself so well endowed with it

formation of character." Can we truthfully say that any of our law makers demonstrated his character?

A formal degree in our country is given an undue precedence over knowledge, experience and common sense. In America, there is flexibility. A person who has knowledge, and experience but may not have a formal college

We always demand something for nothing, we never want to give. This reminds me of the famous Kennedy line which I paraphrase: Ask not what your country can give you; ask what you can give to your country. Selfishness runs in our blood to an irreligious proportion, not to speak of ethical considerations. We have dumped our conscience and deified God, and if there is a thing called divine justice, it too will come.

that those who are hardest to please in any other respect generally have no desire to possess more of it than they have." I will further give you an example from my personal life. I was living in America then and the controversy over abortion, the right to choose and the right to life was raging. My son who at the time was a fifth grader (11 years old) came unto me and asked, "Dad, if I break an egg, will it be considered an abortion?" I was amazed at his depth of introspection, and he was only 11 years old and far from having a degree, even a high school diploma! So, what we have found out (among other things that we already know) during the just-concluded Sangsad session, that our law makers are not only talkative but lack common sense of an eleven year old. Herbert Spencer said that the true outcome of education is not how much one knows, or how much one is formally educated but how education has helped one to build one's character: "Education has for its object the

degree is not discouraged to apply for a job. I know of an English teacher in a local English medium school who has only a high school diploma but has the knowledge and the skill to teach English far better than Masters degree holders. A family of old Dhaka had a humble beginning in business ventures. The father was a brick layer and soon became a small building contractor and by the time he retired, he made a vast fortune and left it to his sons none of whom had any formal education but each one is now a successful businessman and industrialist. My uncle who did not have a college degree remained the chairman of his village for as long as he lived because the people had faith in his 'education,' his honesty, sincerity and dedication. We have more educated knaves in our country than 'uneducated' simple people.

Has terrorism really showed a downward trend as the Home Minister has been saying? Have you been reading the newspaper? Have you noticed any credence to Mr. Nasim's claim? There is a

lot of difference between appearance and reality. Speculations of staged surrender of so called terrorists are in the air, and the arms so far seized or surrendered were for the most part discarded and inoperable. The women's repression goes on as if that is not one of the agendas of the government. The public is in the grip of opposition hartals and when the opposition takes a breather, it is the workers' unions who take over the suspended work of the opposition. Transport strikes have been plaguing the country, ships laden with foodgrains are going back without unloading their cargo because Mangla Port workers want their demands met.

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In closing, I would like to mention our purchase of MIG jet fighters. It is strange none of the news dailies wrote about the deal until it was made final. Only one news weekly, to my knowledge, Holiday, wrote a few investigative reports on the deal. The judiciousness of the purchase has been question both at home and abroad. USA showed its concern over the rationale of the purchase and cast serious doubts of the use of the planes in the long run. The government defended its decision by saying that we need to strengthen our defense system by modernizing it against enemies. Who are our enemies? India? Shucks, no! Myanmar? The Bay of Bengal? Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim?

I am going to bide my time and hope that someday soon. I will have something good to write about something good. Let us keep our fingers crossed!