

Primary Education In Private Hands

—Dr. Nazma Yeasmeen Haque

Primary education is the base of the educational pyramid. Certain factors have weakened this base. It is time remedial measures were found out.

THERE has been, over years, an unprecedented growth in the number of schools catering for children from nursery age to primary level of education in Bangladesh. One cannot but get one's vision caught in some of the multitudes of signboards of schools cropping up in various parts of the city as one passes by. Most of these schools having an optimum number or rather exceeding optimum number of enrollment, show explicitly an ever-increasing demand for schooling as population in our country continues to increase. In view of this situation, the necessity of establishing schools can hardly be over-emphasized.

The education scenario in Bangladesh is replete with predicament so much so that one hasn't got to be sagacious in feeling an acute lack of sense of purpose in this respect. The state of education is therefore indistinct, unstructured, and aimless. The arena of primary education is no exception to it. The woeful situation of most of the government primary schools on the one hand and the ever accelerated rate of opening up private schools in a rather unplanned manner on the other, have turned primary schooling in a neglected but a commercial concern.

Although primary education as the base of the educational pyramid has gained much recognition more or less all over the world, countries that are genuinely concerned with the adequacy, utility and contemporaneity of education have turned their attention toward re-examining the foundation of the educational pursuit. When countries that are far ahead in all respects of development compared to Bangladesh feel the neces-

sity of restructuring and improving their standard of elementary level of education, we can hardly afford to sit still and be complacent with what we have. The hazards of education falling in the private sector to such an accelerated pace in a country like ours could have far-reaching effects. Factor or factors that motivate people to undertake responsibility such as this very well form nucleus of its functioning. It is, therefore not unlikely to lose direction in setting up schools in circumstances when an unprofessional person who had never contemplated of venturing on this job does so for whatever reason that may be. The same can be said of a professional person wishing to set up a school for blarney reasons other than educational. Since Bangladesh is plagued with more than a manageable number of problems, it will be unwise to let the event take its own course and thereby bow to the inevitable.

If there is a striving for excellence in primary education, perhaps one should regard teacher's competence as of prime importance among several other factors all of which are important. During the formative years of child's life, a teacher is not only a person teaching the child, but an ideal or a model who both implicitly and explicitly impresses an image on the child's mind. The best reward a teacher can have is not only in finding that her pupils have learnt what

ever knowledge has been inculcated to them but they have learnt to develop thinking and reasoning as fundamental skills in learning.

In most of our schools more emphasis is given on acquisition of knowledge contained in the texts. There is no doubt that it is the first requirement in learning. But the danger inherent in over-emphasizing this kind of learning is developing more and more reliance on memorization. With more and more explosion of knowledge in today's world, this would be an almost impossible job from both teaching and learning points of view. Therefore, a teacher must motivate learners to develop qualities conducive to learning, for instance, they should be able to think critically, to relate new knowledge to knowledge already obtained, able to see similarities and differences, and to reason intelligently.

Once the scholastic frame work of the mind is developed, no knowledge will be difficult to absorb. One thing that needs to be reiterated here is in order to motivate pupils to learning, a teacher should herself be motivated so that she can set examples to learn from rather than sounding some precepts. As a matter of fact, competence of a teacher at the primary level encompasses myriads of professional and personal qualities that one is seldom aware of. An awareness of this will make it obvious that teaching in lower levels of education is perhaps

the most demanding among all the levels. It will, therefore, destroy the myth prevailing in our society that for teaching the youngsters one need not be an expert or a professional person. It is well to remember that schooling for whatever age-group is meant for learning and not for child-minding.

Closely related to the teacher factor is the method of teaching used at this level. The teacher must have definitive plan how to teach and must teach things thoroughly. It has been observed that compared to elementary schools in some European countries and Soviet Union, children in the American system of elementary education learn less during a specified period of time and are kept busy in too many activities that do not appear to be relevant in the scholastic development of the child. Therefore, many American educators today are emphasizing the characteristics of an elementary school as more of work than of fun as was practised for a long time. Both the content of the curriculum and the method of teaching are vital components of primary education and they should accordingly be given proper thought. Keeping the children busy at school is not the main thing, rather how and with what are they kept busy should be our concern. One thing that particularly worries parents of young children is the felt need of tutoring a child by hiring a teacher at home. Such a perception definitely reflects upon the efficacy of teaching at school. May we therefore hope to teach youngsters in such a way so as to do away with tutoring by employing another teacher at home? Let us put our concerted effort in making our children independent and self-reliant.