

A Uniform Education, Nation Building And Divided Loyalties

Taking a country and moulding its people into a nation requires a good deal of brainwashing. As many states find it increasingly difficult to convince people they are a single nation with a common interest, they resort to a standardized form of education. Those states that have been successful in moulding their peoples into a nation insisted on a uniform education for all school children, as it was believed that only through what is drummed into them in school could they begin to think of themselves as a nation. Although there are some who slip through the net, and there are some who, despite the brainwashing, become terrorists, the system as a whole seems to work.

This concept of building a nation-state is not new, but it needs repeating because the lack of a uniform education has been a hindrance to our efforts to forge ourselves into a nation-state. In other words, what should have been relatively easy for Bangladesh with its largely homogenous population has instead become difficult because there are three different types of educational systems running simultaneously.

If students grow up in widely different systems they leave them holding widely different and often divergent points of view or outlook. That being so, forging people into a single nation if not impossible, is indeed very complicated as each system has become firmly entrenched in our national psyche. If the assumption that education is the unifying factor in nation building is correct, the absence of a uniform curriculum creates a dilemma. Even the plan announced by the government to introduce a semester system in all the educational institutions from 2004 will not help. However as it does fall to the state to do everything in its power to get the people to identify with a common entity, it is now painfully clear that unless we adopt a single educational system, we shall fail.

In order to achieve this the design of a single education system must be an integral part of the total economic and social planning. Just by introducing a semester system we cannot stop the Bengali medium schools from falling behind English medium schools, nor can the Madrashes catch up and fulfil the requirements of a modern state. Within this latter context, the step the government has taken to bring Madrasha education in line with general education is a step in the right direction but, as the effect of change takes time, it will take many years before we can feel the effect.

There are people who think this is all a waste of time as within the context of globalisation, the very concept of a nation-state is outdated and can no longer protect its citizens from the vagaries of the marketplace or give them a voice in economic decision making. Nevertheless we feel the need for a well-knit nation will serve our interests and outweighs all other considerations. The media has a role to play in this too as they must constantly reinforce this view by reporting news from an almost exclusively Bangladeshi angle. This will encourage people to identify with "the nation". If, as some say, our inability to forge our people into a nation is the outcome of the Partition of India that resulted in loyalties being divided, this does not make our task any easier but should increase our determination.