

Education Status In Bangladesh: A True Perspective

Gopal Ben Gupta

ABOUT 25 year ago when I was a primary school student I heard a boy asking his private tutor the English equivalent of the word 'Chunkam'. The tutor after consulting a dictionary said: "You see, 'chun' means 'lime' and 'kam' means 'work'. So together it means 'lime-work'. The boy's father was passing by and over heard the conversation. He interrupted: "How come? Isn't it 'whitewash'... The tutor replied: "Well, Sir, you pay me 10 rupees tuition fee per month. In today's market you don't get whitewash for 10 rupees, you get only limework."

The above dialogue perhaps is a reflection of the standard of our school teachers and that of our education itself. In this connection, I would like to offer my following comments: The education system in Bangladesh does not yet have the scope to educate all our children. Not only there is lack of adequate schools but the quality of education itself is poor. The result is that Bangladesh has one of the lowest adult literacy rates in the world. The quality of education is low because of poorly trained teachers, teachers absenteeism, a curriculum that is not relevant to the needs of the students and little time spent on actual teaching learning. Although about 77% of children enroll in school, only about half of them attend regularly, and almost half of them drop out altogether especially during the first two years. About 35% of those who enter the system in grade I finish the five years of primary school and a mere 5% are able to pass the HSC examination in grade XII. These rates are amongst the lowest in Asian countries and underdeveloped countries having a GNP per capita below \$400.

The more dominant reason for the high dropout rate are distance to school and poor teaching and learning situations. According to World Bank estimates, if the goal of Universal Primary Education is to be met, about 100,000 classrooms need to be built over the next ten years. Past investments in construction of schools have brought about little change in the literacy rates.

Girls enroll at a slightly lower rate and dropout faster than boys. However, their enrollment is steadily increasing and the boy-girl ratio in primary schools is currently 56:44. Nevertheless, only 22% of adult women are literate compared to 43% of men. The lack of education attainment of women has serious implications for the welfare of the family since it restricts their opportunities for work and reduces their effectiveness as mothers. It leads to poor health, nutrition and sanitation practices and limited social and economic prospects, which in turn, has a negative effect on infant and maternal mortality.

The Government is committed to Education for All and has introduced compulsory primary education and free education for rural girls until class VIII. Sixty per cent. of all teacher positions have been targeted for women. Free text books are now being supplied to students which may contribute to increased enrollment. A revised curriculum is being introduced in 1992 which puts more emphasis on the application of learning, continuing assessment rather than tests and school-based education rather than homework. A 'Women in Development' unit has

been set up at the National committee for Text Books to monitor curricula and text books on gender bias. Primary education in Bangladesh is free but not compulsory in fact. The reason is said to be lack of resources. Compulsory education would surely be a huge expenditure. But an expenditure on education is an investment. This investment may not produce instant or short-term profits. But the human resources it will produce will surpass all short term gains. But it is also said that there are people who are too prone to look for quick gains by short-term means. In consequence, they find their lives also ending up in 'short-term' at all levels.

In this connection, I may mention about some of the World War II veterans in our part of pre-independence India. We saw illiterate, idle, good-for-nothing, vagrant village folks join the labour corps of the then British Indian Army and to return to the village with some skills with which they found works for themselves and earned moderate livelihood.

For a good learning situation at

school we need good teacher. And to have good teachers we must give them the necessary economic security, freedom of work, authority of educational management, and social status. In short, we must give them a good life so that they may feel responsible to themselves, to their pupils, and to the society. Otherwise, talented people will not be attracted to the teaching profession, as is the case today.

An independent Educational Service for all levels of public education, not only for the college, will be needed to attract talented people to teaching. Our top-notch university students, after completing education, complete for the most coveted Civil Service jobs because they give them the aspired-after security, authority, power and status. And many of them make the educational institutions their springboard for a leap to the royal road of Civil Service or for other rewarding jobs. If they get similar benefits at schools, I believe, they will stay on. Like the hierarchy of the civil service, there should be a hierarchy of the Educational Service with all teachers recruited through competitive examinations for all levels primary, secondary and higher.