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Academic Colonization

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THE destiny of Bangladesh relies on the kind and content of education our society obtains. He who dominates and guides the content of education of any society dominates their opinions and perceptions.

After a period of two centuries of British colonial rule, our institutionalized education has had only one objective: to Westernize the Bangladeshis elite in thought, perceptions and conduct. The subjects offered, the curriculum, the textbooks, the structure of courses and the system demonstrate the aims of Bangladeshi higher education intended for Bangladesh and manufactured by Britain.

The entire operation is pursued for the purpose of internationalizing "knowledge", which actually represents the internationalization of European knowledge without in-depth consideration for the knowledge, culture, past and contemporary civilization, and philosophies of the Asian societies.

For example, comparative analysis indicates that the contribution of Islamic civilization to human progress have survived the test of history. It has contributed significantly to the birth of modern technology, par-

ticularly in science and mathematics.

After the First World War, the colonial authority recognized that it could not forever occupy its South Asian territories as the movement for independence accelerated. Thus the British considered an alternative that would uphold their links with their colonies when the latter obtain formal independence.

Handsome scholarships were extended for the training of South Asian personnel in British institutions to equip them for the future administrative vacancies. It was planned that the cultural and economic relationship between the metropolitan power and the colonial territory should not alter due to political decolonization. Academic institutions, such as the University of Dhaka, were established to create a new indoctrinated status quo.

What Britain understood and possessed was provided to Bangladesh in its content and operation: The higher seat of education in our country was based upon the Oxford model. The Westernizing influence has been total in its impact, with disastrous results for the politics and economics of our society.

The contemporary academic elite at the University of Dhaka,

as well as the political, bureaucratic and cultural elite produced by it, appear to be too sat-

isfied with the status and privileges flowing from the system for formulate and implement the fundamental reforms required to prevent our society from plunging into the abyss of anarchy.

Our post-colonial national experience has demonstrated that our most desired goal, that of socio-economic development, is still a mirage, in spite of the ritual implementation of all development principles, models and concepts formulated at Anglo-American academic and financial institutions and "validated" scientifically.

The implementation has been by Bangladeshis educated in Bangladeshi institutions copied from the British models, by Anglo-American academics and technocrats, and by Bangladeshis educated in British and North American Universities. The inapplicability of Anglo-American socio-economic formulas to Bangladeshi underdevelopment is now beyond debate.

The fundamental cause of our present tragedy is the miseducation of our decision-making elite. All attempted cure for our national disease have failed be-

cause each diagnosis is incorrect.

During the era of colonialism, the West controlled us with their armed forces, but now they dominate and exploit us through subtle and effective thought control. This is the age of rule by ideas. If our society is to get on the right track, it must undertake voluntary physiological decolonization first.

The academic elite must abandon its obsession with not rocking the boat, and its preoccupation with job security and the survival of our language (it is not threatened any longer). What we need is a new Bangladeshi solution for the Bangladeshi problem.

It is time we did some intellectual soul-searching, returned to our cultural roots, and rejected the formulas of Oxford University and the World Bank which are designed to continue neocolonialism.

We require a system of higher education that fits our own environment. The present system produces graduates who either form a misinformed elite or expand the horde of frustrated and disillusioned unemployed.

Can the present academic elite rise to the occasion, before it is too late?