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# Education through ages

Shaikh Ahmed

The origins of education are rooted in prehistoric days. When people lived in groups as hunters or food gatherers, education was primarily vocational. Children were taught the arts of survival, and teachers were presumably parents and other members of the family. It may be assumed that in those days efficiency in education was a matter of life and death, as those unable to learn the arts of survival did not survive.

In the earliest periods of recorded history, religion appears to have played a leading role in education. There is evidence that writing was developed to record religious texts. The holy Bible, the Hindu Vedas, and Upanishads were transmitted orally for many—centuries before being written down, as was Greek classical literature.

In modern times, religion has had considerable influence on education in developing countries. Quranic schools were most influential for a millennium over an area extending from Indonesia to West Africa. The Christian Church has played a leading role in educational activities in many countries. Indian education owes much to the Hindu gurus who taught the Sanskrit scriptures. The Buddhist Wats of Thailand were, until the 20th century, the main source of education for the common people there.

The concept of free compulsory education originated in Europe and North America but was



CHITTAGONG: Prof Hamida Banu giving away prizes to winners of the indoor games competition of Shamsunnahar Hall of Chittagong University recently. The competition was organised by the hall students union.

not widely promoted until the 19th century. It is thus of recent origin.

In India, the concept of education is as old as 1500 B.C. when Vedic Aryans prescribed a fairly long period of Education for all children through religious practice. Education of boys and girls began in about the eighth year, when they were introduced into homes of their gurus where they studied for eight to sixteen years. The Curriculum included not only religious teachings, but also all branches of knowledge as they were then known.

With the advent of the Muslim period in the 9th century new systems of education were brought to

the subcontinent. The Maktab, which corresponded to the Hindu elementary school, was generally attached to Mosques and was designed to teach boys and girls how to read and write. Emphasis was placed on reading the holy Qu'or'an. The Madrasa, which corresponded to the Hindu institutions for higher education, prepared a highly educated group of men to be priests, judges, doctors, or members of other professions.

British rulers were the first to involve the government in a big way with education in the subcontinent. However, debate arose over the medium of education. Should it be English, classical In-

dian languages, or vernacular languages spoken by common people? A system of English education was adopted and encouraged by the government. Meanwhile, the Christian missionary movement, whose goal was to reach as many people as possible, began printing books in the vernacular languages.

The government, following some proposals made in 1854, attempted to create in India a comprehensive system of education from the primary to the university level. It set up departments of education in each of the Indian Presidencies, instituted universities in the Presidency towns, gave more attention to vernacular schools for both secondary and primary education.