

Need for community college

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Once Churchill said, 'war is too important to be left to the Generals'. Paraphrasing one might say that education is too important to be left to the educationists. It should be left to those who are affected by it. It is because by now it is clear that elitist pressures have intruded at all levels of education forcing the system to respond but such pressures have little to do with goal of eradication of low-end poverty which has made life in Bangladesh a chronicle of woes.

Basic education is the glue which holds the society together. In Bangladesh various agencies are now engaged in educational activities. But learning to read and write is only the beginning of adult education. The newly literate person should go on to higher levels and for this he needs a permanent educational set up close to his place of residence.

A 'community college' can be that set-up. It will bring together an entire community for a common education purpose.

Any adult who has missed his basic education should be able to acquire it in some institution. The question is: what does an adult do after becoming literate? Adult education centres are not permanent. They are closed after the small budget allotted to them is spent. A regular community college will keep the

new adult learners in the educational orbit for as long as they want.

Community colleges can be of great help even to those with secondary level qualifications. Many of them go to colleges not because they really want to but because of an absence of post-secondary alternative educational arrangements.

COURSES

At a lower level industrial training centres are not able to provide seats for all those who apply. The community college can be an all-purpose open-door institution providing a variety of courses covering technical, commercial and artistic fields.

It can also provide short-term courses for those who are already employed (in association with the concerned organisations). In the United Kingdom colleges of further education provide this type of training jointly with industrial enterprises.

Community colleges by making courses open to every interested person can create a desire for education in all those who have never thought of educating themselves. No one need worry about 'passing' or 'failing'. A person can take a course as many times as he wants to reach a certain level of proficiency.

An individual can reach his maximum potential only when he pursues a vocation of his interest. What is done under

pressure or for the sake of status or employment will be neither satisfactory to the individual nor to the organisation for which he may have to work.

Delinking of jobs and degrees is suggested as a solution. But as Professor V.V. John has pointed out "the problem is the expensive irrelevance of the university degree for most kinds of jobs and our habit of ignoring the simple fact that the skills needed for the jobs could be acquired outside the university system." The community college can come to our aid as a suitable arrangement outside the university catering to an individual's or an organisation's specific requirements. Nearly half of our six hundred colleges are academically non-viable and as such these colleges should be used for evening class and short-term courses.

In other words they should function as community colleges. The University Grants Commission is the right body to consider the conversion of non-viable colleges into community colleges and to suggest the basic framework for the starting of new community colleges. It should appoint a task force composed of eminent educationists to study the idea in depth. One should not forget that basic education unlocks the door of development. A community college is not to be thought

of as a place of vocational education only. It should combine liberal arts and technical courses in an imaginative way to offer scope to every member of the community. The Parkland Community College in Illinois U.S. offers 928 courses including courses for watch repairing and bicycle repairing.

LITERACY

Literacy indeed holds the key to the release of creative forces. In Europe and America the literacy percentage was well above seventy at the beginning of the industrial revolution two hundred years ago.

John Kenneth Galbraith in a lecture delivered in India ignored all the technicalities of economics and strongly emphasised the need for a frontal attack on illiteracy. He came down heavily on those who identify economic development with mills and factories. He said: "In all of the older industrial countries the early emphasis was not on capital investment but on educational and cultural development. In the United States, Western Europe and notably more recently in Japan the initial emphasis in both thought and action on economic development was popular education. These were considered the first requisites of economic progress....."

Degrees and diplomas are only a small part of education. The most important and basic aspect of education is change

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and innovation. A good road, a good hospital and a good film indicate educational advancement. At a higher level its aim is excellence.

PEOPLE'S COLLEGE

This excellence is the collective excellence of the community. Once this gathers momentum, dynamic change which is the foundation of progress will begin to replace habitual ways of thinking and acting. In this new kind of total education every member of the community is a student and a learning centre to discover this new way of learning and working is the community college.

A community college is really a people's college. In it the least-motivated would also get some exposure to a learning atmosphere.

In Bangladesh the poorest are the illiterate and unskilled people. Organised labour is well above the poverty line. The economically weakest are in agriculture and in traditional small businesses. In both fields productivity is very low leading to a more or less permanent poverty equilibrium. Only innovation and co-operation can break the poverty equilibrium and make people work hard with a sense of security.

A radical change of this nature is essentially an educational task embracing the entire community. A community college is the set-up where such a task can be undertaken in a systematic manner.