

Editorial

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College education

AS IT regularly happens with schools, students are crowding the few colleges in the metropolis that have a sort of an educational halo around their names for admission into the intermediate courses. With the secondary school certificate results out, there is naturally a rush for admission, more so because of a university directive to commence the intermediate courses by an early date. But at most other colleges, supposed to be plebian, the admission season reportedly hasn't so far been visited by any deluge of intending entrants. With 45 thousand less pupils passing out of the schools this year, as compared to that of last year, there is little prospect that things will warm up much in these colleges even at the close of the admission season.

There is no doubt that a lot of people do believe that some colleges impart better education than others. It isn't indeed unreasonable to feel that some colleges employ better teachers and work a better schedule and keep better to the calendar. But all this is what ideally should have been. A close look at the actual situation prevailing in the colleges should soon dispel all such notions as some pet illusions. Colleges and classes count little up to the HSC level—everything depends on private coaching, to be had of the self same teachers lecturing the classes—and on acquisition of notes and on memorising these mantra-fashion as the material had been prepared against

surefire tips.

And then again because the 'premier' institutions only admit the highest scoring students, there is really no telling as to how good these colleges are. These colleges, in their turn, churn out super-scoring boys and girls—whatever be the method of achieving this—caring little about the disquieting thought that possibly none of these bright ones have been imparted a 'true education' that could lead one to a life of humanity and service and social fulfilment.

While college education in the metropolis has much uncomfortable features, what's happening out in the districts? We would rather not take up here the cases of those joints run by some 'teachers' only to ensure an extra taka—which is additional to what they earn regularly from more respectable institutions. These joints are also called colleges but are in fact examination halls specialising in helping the students in their act of copying. Government, it seems, has although belatedly, woken up to the nuisance of such. Let us then rather talk of genuine institutions of standing and renown.

Devendra College was Manikganj's premier institution for higher secondary and degree courses. As a matter of course it was 'nationalised' in good time. It doesn't still now offer honours courses in all the subjects that a city degree college does. Why? As the only institution at its level in a whole region—it shouldn't have suffered from this lack.

And then there's a chronic shortage of teachers plaguing this college. Shortage not as measured against enrolment or enrolment-demand. But, strangely enough, against sanctioned and existing posts. And the

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number of vacant positions runs into dozens. Why? What would happen to the pupils? Will they be asked to move to Dhaka—a mere 50-mile remove spatially, but financially it may mean a two-thousand taka difference. And where's the guarantee that even in the capital city the pupil would get a seat in a college that is fully staffed and offers his or her desired course?

Perhaps the evil now vitiating secondary and pre-degree education in Dhaka has already started taking its toll even in that backyard of a town—Manikganj. Why must a college need to be manned fully and for all the time if students anyhow depend on private coaching and copying to successfully add to the college's glory?

There's only one girl's college in Manikganj. The situation there can well be imagined from Devendra College's plight. Shortage of teachers is far more acute there. How can one explain this in a country full of unemployed academic achievers?

For all one knows the college education scene in Manikganj may be quite typical of what obtains in the whole of the country. And some may even have the suspicion that Devendra College, being run by government, is in a decidedly better condition than most of the private ones. And it is quite possible that quite a number of the government run colleges are in a far worse situation than Devendra College which incidentally doesn't even have a compound wall.

Perhaps it is pertinent here to point to a very strange aspect of college education in Bangladesh. Some colleges in Bangladesh offer masters courses. But these are situated in metropolitan cities and towns

that are near to them and have universities and medical colleges to take on post-graduate aspirants. As a result the whole of the country, so to say, remains in practical terms, outside of the pale of higher education. What would a girl passing B.A. do in her native Dinajpur or Kushtia or Pabna? Or a boy wanting to go in for engineering or medicine? What is the point in clustering the highest seats of education at one, two or three spots?

Contrary to the current practice, colleges in farflung and remote areas should be charged with carrying some selected functions of the university. Necessity will force this to be accepted at some point of time in the future. Why not do it now?