

## Historical Perspective

# Nationalization Of Primary Education In Bangladesh

—Dr. Saifuddin Ahmed

**P**RIMARY Education in Bangladesh consisting of grade 1 to 5 for the age group population of 6 to 10 years is a nationalized system of education. There are over 37,000 nationalized primary schools in the country with a total of over 160,000 teachers who are government employees and paid from public exchequer as all other public servants. The nationalized primary schools enrol about 108 million pupils which represents 71% of the total primary school age population.

Bangladesh inherited a system of control of primary education by the local government and the teachers of primary schools being employees of the local government. The history of the process of nationalization started long ago and culminated in the year 1974 when by an Act of the parliament primary education system was nationalized by the government and the primary teachers were declared government servants. This paper will outline the historical perspective of nationalization of primary education in Bangladesh.

### Successive Acts.

On the eve of the partition of British India in 1947, the management and control of primary education in rural areas of Bangladesh was vested in the District School Board, created under the provision of the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act, 1930, and the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education (Amendment) Act, 1943. In the urban areas, the municipalities were responsible for the administration of primary education. East Bengal which became a province of Pakistan inherited this system of management and control of primary education by local bodies. A change in the system was effected for the first time by the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education (East Bengal Amendment) Act, 1951, which provided for the taking over of the administration of primary education by the provincial government in phases in a period of ten years from the hands of the District School Boards and Local Boards (in case of Sylhet which was amalgamated with East Bengal at the time of partition of British India). This system of management and control of primary education in rural areas partly by District School Board and partly by Provincial Government was in vogue till 1957. In the year 1957, the East Pakistan (Rural) Primary Education (Supplementary Provisions) Act, 1957 and in the year 1985, the Sylhet Rural

Primary Education (Supplementary Provisions) Act, 1958 were enacted to provide for direct administration of primary education in the rural areas of Bangladesh by Provincial Government. These Acts abolished the District School Boards and Local Boards and vested the power of the District School Boards and Local Boards in the District Magistrates and Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet respectively. This system continued till 1974 in which year the Government of Bangladesh by an Act (Act No. No VIII of 1974) took over all primary schools under public management in both rural and urban areas to administer the affairs of those schools in such manner as it may deem fit. The teachers of primary schools were made government servants.

### Sargent Report.

The Report by the Central Advisory Board of Education popularly known as Sargent Report of 1944 opined that a mistake was made in the administration of education particularly in the lower stages was handed over to local bodies. In theory, it was good to enlist local interest in education and there was much to be said for delegating a certain amount of control to local bodies, provided that they were competent to exercise it. In practice, however, irremediable harm was done by handing over responsibility for the education of rising generation to bodies whose members were in the main uneducated or uninterested in education or both. The situation became still worse when local bodies did not possess the funds which they would required to discharge their duties properly even if they were willing and able to do so. It was significant that several of the popular governments which attempted to introduce educational reforms on a large scale found efforts to a large extent vitiated by the apathy and incompetence of local bodies.

The Report of the East Bengal Educational System Reconstruction Committee 1952. This committee opined that the elected members of the District School Board because of their party interest could not be impartial in respect of the administration of primary education, particularly in respect of appointment and transfer of teachers and allocation of funds to individual schools. Besides, because of their part time nature of work the elected members could not give full

attention to the administration of primary education.

The Report of the Educational Reforms Commission, East Pakistan, 1957. The Commission strongly felt that the entire control of primary education should vest fully into the Government. It was argued that the old system of government was replaced by one which was directly responsible to people. The demand, therefore, of the autonomy in this sphere of activity is meaningless. The administration on the principle of divided responsibility that had been guiding the activity of primary education in the country must therefore go. In the name of autonomy most serious irregularities had been common in most of the School Boards. For a nation in its infancy and with very limited funds at their disposal, these experiments were ruinous. The control, therefore, of the primary education should revert to the government in entirety, the commission recommended.

The Commission on National Education 1960 noted that on the devolution of power in 1921, education was entrusted to the control of local Bodies. So long as the District boards had official chairman, administration was reasonably good. On their replacement by elected chairman, there was a setback in the administrative machinery. The deliberations of the Local Boards were more often influenced by personal and party considerations than by the merits of the case being discussed.

The Commission further stated that owing to continued maladministration, the government of the various provinces in Pakistan successively took over control from local bodies, except in the former Punjab. However, the teachers of the schools in that region had been petitioning government year after year to take control in its own hands.

Bangladesh proclaimed independence on the 26th day of March 1971 and through a historic war of national independence established the independent, sovereign People's Republic of Bangladesh. It adopted democracy and socialism together with the principles derived from them to constitute the fundamental principles of state policy. The state policy on education are as follows:

The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of  
 a. Establishing a uniform, mass-

oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law;

b. Relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs;

c. Removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law.

### Conclusions

On the basis of the facts presented in the preceding paragraphs the following conclusions on the historical perspective of the nationalization of primary education in Bangladesh can be drawn.

Firstly, the local bodies in charge of the management and control of primary education received very adverse criticisms as being inefficient, corrupt and financially incapable, and the Government was urged by successive committees and commissions to take over the control of primary education in its own hands in the interest of efficient management and control.

Secondly, the adverse official views against the local bodies weighed very heavily against them and successive acts reduced the authorities of the local bodies and ultimately paved the way for nationalization of primary education.

Thirdly, the movement of the primary school teachers gave added impetus for taking over the control of primary education by the government in its own hands and for declaring the teachers as Government employees. The teachers foresaw in the nationalized system a better service conditions and in fact it brought forth for them a better pay and status comparable to other services.

Lastly, the constitutional provision for a "uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children..." derived from the fundamental State policy of democracy and socialism also contributed to expedite the process of nationalization of primary education so as to introduce universal and compulsory primary education in the country at an early date. It was perhaps believed that a nationalized system of primary education would better be able to attain the objectives of State policy or primary education as enunciated in the constitution of the country.