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Reforming Secondary Education

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IT is a general proposition that any system of education is reflected in its output i.e. the quality of the elite, the leadership and educated people in general produced in a country. Secondary education serves as the bridge or connecting link. So, due attention should be given from the very outset to such a vital issue. Needless to mention, secondary education, was first conceived of and implemented by the then British administration of India.

In order to have a thorough working knowledge on the subject, it is necessary that we should look back and analyse the genesis of the introduction of modern learning of science and technology and that of English education to which the system of secondary education is interlinked. In this part of the world. However, the inhabitants of the then India, after the British conquest, were not at first receptive to modern learning and for that matter, the new rulers with the object of having intellectual control of the empire, sought to introduce their own learning and in that connection, the name of William Bentinck, the then Governor-General of India, must be remembered as a pioneer of English learning in the subcontinent. He, with the active co-operation of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the latter being a patriot, played their due role for the introduction of the new learning. Ram Mohan visualised that if his countrymen remained aloof from modern learning they would definitely lag behind in every field. Keeping this in view, he did much to help the British move. In this long-drawn struggle, a dedicated English missionary and educationist, David Hare, left an immortal legacy of service. It must be remembered that Lord Macaulay was the mentor and author of English education in this country. However, at a latter stage another Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, sought to introduce under modern lines the spread of general education in various parts of the then subcontinent. As the Muslims of India at that time were not at all ready to cooperate with the British they were subjected to injustice and harassment from the very start. To deliver them from the situation, Nawab Abdul Latif, a far-sighted leader of this subcontinent, left no stone unturned for the uplift of Muslim-education and succeeded to a remarkable degree. But the history of adoption of English language and learning would remain incomplete if the contributions of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan are not honourably mentioned, who appeared on the scene to invigorate the Muslim mind to accept modern education. To that end, this great pioneer of learning had set up Anglo-Oriental School—College the fore-runner of the renowned Muslim University at Aligarh which bore fruits in the subsequent Muslim Renaissance in the sub-continent and in the freedom struggle.

Decades passed by, the inhabitants

of this country have awakened from their deep slumber. The Union Jack has long been gone but the utility of learning of English has not diminished. Rather, it is to date regarded as the "lingua franca" all over the modern world.

Education in general and particularly at the secondary stage in Bangladesh seems completely to be in doldrums. Unfortunately, due to continual political movements and agitations, our educational system faces setback and has often been made 'scapegoat' of hasty decisions and consequently, it has undergone modifications to suit expedient or ulterior motives. Hence, in order to streamline and adapt the existing system to the changing pattern of our society a few steps may be taken with an eye to the future without being whipped off by emotion.

As already stated, the standard of English learning has dwindled miserably over the years. The remnants of it we inherit today are not even upto producing efficient 'writers' to shoulder responsibilities or speaking plainly, contributing towards running offices, not to speak of exhibiting extra-ordinary feats, of course, with an exception of a microscope few. Currently the situation being critical the government besides making English a compulsory subject upto Degree level, have recently relaxed certain service rules and extended the age-limit of the recently-retiring teachers in English to continue teaching. But the said step seems to be a stop gap arrangement. We must face that fact squarely. Simultaneously, we should discount the puerile notion that our emphasis on a foreign language, might bring our mother language to naught. We know that there is a famous phrase 'bilingual proficiency', meaning thereby that in order to achieve proficiency in a language that of another is necessary to master the same.

Owing mainly to the apathy shown to English, mushroom growth of English medium schools has sprung up. It is a common experience that the poverty-stricken children as well as the teeming millions in the rural areas are deprived of those schools. Consequently, a dual trend in the secondary education is in sight and much damage is being perpetrated in the sense that bad elements of alien ways are infiltrating our society. This situation has arisen as a result of our failure to give due stress on the learning of English in regular educational institutions.

While emphasis is being put on the teaching of English, we should not lose sight of the fact that the matter should be tackled reasonably and systematically. In doing this, a baby should be acquainted with its mother tongue i.e. Bangla first and then English which should be introduced from the third class onwards. There should be two papers in English

examinations right from the beginning upto the Seventh class of which one paper should be set for Grammar-Composition and from unseen matters and thenceforward, three papers i.e. from the Eighth class upto HSC examinations. But the cherished objectives would fall far short of the target, if the medium of instruction from Higher Secondary level upwards is other than English.

So-called Social Studies

The introduction of "Social Studies" from primary to SSC level of the Secondary Education in lieu of History, Geography, besides being superfluous and unfruitful proves psychologically tail—some to the adolescents. Our boys and girls under that age-group are more apt to memorising than concentrate on serious topics such as social evolution, transformation, economic theorising and so on which are in accessible to the minds of that generation. To fit in the circumstances, courses on the history of the sub-continent with that of Islam and world Geography to be replenished in place of the so called "social studies."

One of the cardinal principles of a true educational foundation is the attainment of behavioural or mental discipline. If a man or a woman behaves rationally and ethically he or she cannot go astray and is said to be culturally advanced. Unfortunately, most of our students if not all, seem to be restive and devoid of ethical values. To hold this process in check, logic should be made compulsory in the HSC Humanities group.

It is heartening to note that the percentage of female students in our country is on the increase for the last few years and co-education is common but the way it is being done is far from ideal. The girl students are often maltreated sometimes leading to untoward incidents.

Arguments may be advanced in favour of the continuance of the same to the effect that our economy cannot afford separate institutions for boys and girls. This argument is fallacious as within a foreseeable future, the co-education institutions would likely to be too crowded to accommodate the growing number of students.

Charges are levelled against some rural based school/colleges/madrassas that both attendance and holding of classes are poor. If at all true, the trend may effectively be put to a halt by frequent and sudden inspection by the authority. Allegations about the sorry plight of teaching in some of the schools/madrassas is evident from their poor performance in examinations. This may be corrected by resorting to measures such as withholding of recognition for three to five years in case of default. These measures have to be taken after due

deliberations with the relevant authorities.

Infrastructural problems

The quality of teaching is primarily dependent on the infrastructural facilities such as proper housing of the educational institutions, availability of black-boards, scientific instruments, charts, maps and above all eligible teachers. Often the rural schools/madrassas are found to be deprived of adequate seating arrangement. It is an irony of fate that sometimes, budget allocations are made most lavishly against trifling matters while some other vital matters are being neglected to the detriment of the future citizens of the country.

Secondly, a great number of schools in the rural areas suffer from problems relating to the Managing Bodies. Members openly indulge in jealousy and squabbling. Sometimes, persons of criminal nature venture to enrol themselves as 'donor members.' In one case three members formed the managing committee from teachers and acted as the bargaining agents whereby they used flimsy excuses to put a stumbling block in the proper running of the institution. It is a process of accumulation of power in the hands of employees, by which no disciplinary action, if needed, can be taken against them in case of gross violation. Students in the process are the worst sufferers.

Squabbles prevent well meaning officials of the managing bodies to work up to expectation. Consequently, vital decisions in respect of welfare of the schools are put off indefinitely. Things may be improved if the post of President is filled in by a government nominee from the administrative service while the Vice-President may come through election by the guardians and the patrons.

In combating inefficiency in teaching and management, at least one government school may be set up in every existing thana area.

A considerable portion of our budget allocations are squandered away on intermediate colleges at the expense of secondary schools. It dates back to the last decade when an ill-conceived policy was pursued towards nationalisation of at least one college within a thana area without regard to feasibility or any set principle whatsoever.

This led to a good many intermediate colleges whose enrolment strength, physical communication links and also performance are far below the standard.

It is not worthwhile that each and every thana must have a government college without being viable. It is against the system of competitive progress of education. It is high time that the government should put a brake on the process forthwith and denationalise those bankrupt institutions.