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Crisis In Higher Education-I

The quality of tertiary level—that is, post secondary level—education is always based on (i) the quality of primary and secondary education, (ii) the facilities provided in institutions of higher education—usually colleges, Alim, Fazil and Kamil madrasahs and Universities—in terms of teaching staff, libraries and laboratory facilities, (iii) the supply of reading materials, and (iv) the students' facilities for living in terms of food, clothes and housing. In providing each of these items, our country is, at present, deficient. As a consequence, the quality of our higher education is, in general, substantially short of what we desire. It seems necessary to take stock of the situation prevalent in order to remove the deficiencies.

First, as regards the quality of primary and secondary level education, we notice clear deficiencies. At the primary level, education is, of course, free in the rural areas. In the urban areas, there are the schools run by municipal authorities. But private schools are catering to the needs of the majority of the boys and girls for education. Even in some developed villages, there are what is known as "K.G. Schools" where education is provided to boys and girls for fixed fees to be paid by guardians.

In the free primary schools in our rural areas the main problem appears to be the absence of seriousness on the part of (i) students, who, in most cases, are sent to school with inadequate reading and writing materials on account of the guardians' poverty, (ii) guardians the majority of whom are either illiterate or do not realise the value of education. They have a clearly positive VOC ("value of children") which means that children are counted as contributors to the family income. Consequently, their absence from home for attending school is considered to cause some loss to the family income; (iii) teachers who do not get enough pay for ignoring the need for supplementing their salary which they get straight from the Government, so that they do not have to be answerable to anybody in the locality who can supervise their work.

Education at the secondary level is of a deficient standard for the large majority of the students, as is testified by the high percentage of failure in the terminal public examination (S.S.C. examination) of this stage. The pursuit of excellence of pedagogy by teachers at this level is disturbed on account of (a) the neglect they have, for long, been suffering in terms of pay which is—curious as it may seem—usually lower than the pay drawn by the teachers at the primary level; (b) the rather frequent change of the system of education at this level by commissions and committees of various names and descriptions.

At the post-secondary level, the colleges, the Universities and the upper level madrasahs (Alim, Fazil and Kamil madrasahs) are now suffering from our students' exposure to the difficult situation of our introducing the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction without an adequate supply of reading materials in the mother-tongue. Two decades are nearly over since this decision has been implemented. But the paucity of reading materials in our mother-tongue is making our students at the tertiary level suffer more than anybody else. Usually, in our Universities, students who use English rather than Bengali, as their medium of education show better performance, in the examinations. This is one aspect of the crisis in our higher education. There are other aspects which we hope to take up for a discussion shortly.

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