

Schooling Costs

School-going children today are becoming younger and younger than ever before, and we have it on good authority that infants of only three are now being inducted into the school system. Much of this is due to the fact that more and more mothers of small children, have to work, but also, much is also due to the fact that many women simply want to get the children "out of their hair" for a few hours a day. In our day, however, it was frequently the practice to keep children at home upto the age of five or six years and, often, when finally admitted into school, the actual age of the child was reduced, so as to give the child a better chance in life, which of course, resulted in people having a "real age" and an "official" one.

Although this seems incomprehensible to many, especially to any foreigner, there was good reason for doing this for an official age lower than his real one would permit him to appear in Public Service examinations with age limits, for the gap between the two was sufficient to allow for the chance of failure along the way. Today, we no longer tolerate failure and expect small children of three or four to be able to read and write like a master, for schools demand on admission, for small children be able to do all those things we formally expected the schools to do. Yet people are seen to move heaven and earth in pursuit of a seat for their child.

This has given rise to a strange phenomenon, one which takes over the city at a particular time each year when parents run from pillar to post to attain their most prized possession, a seat in a place of learning. Nowadays, however, it is also a situation which has become for many an ordeal, for competition is so strong that it well may be that many children will need to be registered at birth to obtain a seat in the school of choice, and unless subject to controls, gives the schools the opportunity to raise fees as they wish, and to also ask for larger donations.

Incidentally, the most sought after schools today, are those with facilities for education up to class twelve or its equivalent. This is not really so surprising, for the effort needed to be expended in changing schools or gaining admission into colleges is often too fatiguing for most. But, what we find more startling than any of this, is that the cost of schooling does not appear to be a deterrent for most although high fees and large donations should logically work as a bar for the middle classes who have to survive on fixed incomes. From Play Group to 'O' and 'A' Levels, fees are astronomically high, and as fees are to be paid in advance, sometimes for a whole year, we cannot wonder from where the money is coming. If there are more than one school-going child in the family, as invariably there are, parents may end paying as much as Thirty Six Thousand Taka, or more, in pursuit of education for three, with no guarantee they will get what they are paying for.