

Commercialisation Of Education—And More

It is painful to have to say that education looks commercialised on a scale never known before. Not that the teacher taught for free, or did never offer teaching services on a private basis, did not write text books or note books or do similar educational work to add to his income. But those activities were of a piece with his professional work as a teacher and hardly, if ever, earned the stigma of commercialisation. Teaching was a dignified vocation and the teacher was a dignified personality in his own right. By his devotion to work, his regard for ethics of teaching, his solicitude for the improvement of his pupils, above all by a brand of idealism handed down to him from Socrates he was perhaps the most respected person—and institution in society. It will not be churlish but painfully true that all these seem increasingly a thing of the past, bar of course honourable exceptions that only prove the rule.

One tell-tale instance, among many that go usually unnoticed, is concerning the teaching of subjects at school, college or university. Private entrepreneurs have appeared in shoals, so to say, to offer private "tutorial" courses in most of them from arts to science, commerce or highly technical subjects, computer training included. And our information in most of these private tutorial houses have a problem coping with increasing numbers of applicants for admission.

It happens to English medium Kindergartens or English medium schools, specially. The stampede has come on the heels of English being turned taboo in the overall education programme in the country. And as rather a bizarre phenomenon the Department of English, Dhaka University, for instance, has advertised an arrangement of its own to teach English on a private basis. The department having withdrawn English from the BA pass syllabus perhaps unwittingly created a new market for English. Business prospects for the enterprise therefore look quite bright.

Trading in education has taken on other forms as well: newspapers have carried reports of examination question papers being leaked or sold, corrupt practices involving selling of degree certificates, bad books being selected as text books to the exclusion of good ones by schools, teachers devoting more time to private coaching than to regular work and so on. Commercialisation has linked up with politicisation of education to drive the last nail into the coffin. No wonder we now have an education, or education output that is far below the mark.

Taken at their face value these are pretty unsavoury facts, much to the disadvantage of the teacher. But the teacher for his part has a case that is as much worth weighing in judgement pronounced on him.

Those days when poverty was a teacher's pride are gone. Relative to the price indices or to other jobs for the educated his pay and emoluments remain the poorest. Most niggardly has been the rises sanctioned in the education budgets of successive governments in this country while the present government claims to have raised it to an all time high. With inflation at 8% and consumer price rise at 12% he is very much hard put to keep the wolf from his door (to use very appropriately a worn-out cliché). He has to do something in his line to supplement his income and live.

Idealism which the teacher of old personified has been destroyed not only by poverty but by the neglect of him and his profession by government. When idealism starts crumbling it can go to the other extreme of cynicism. This should however be no licence for a teacher to deliberately sacrifice principle or idealism to expediency or low monetary or material interests.

There certainly are ways by which the problem can to some extent be eased. If you are not paying the teacher in cash, give him in kind. Certain categories of public servants (from the defence personnel down to the police) enjoy subsidised benefits. The teacher in our view has a strong case for this kind of specialised treatment. In return the administration can demand from him devotion to duty, dedication, hard work and quality education. A monitoring body can be set up to keep watch on the activities of a teacher. And that could be done only when you have done a really just turn to him.