



A student speaks

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WORRIES about our standard of education are nothing new. Poor rate of literacy and poor standards of teaching and facilities are some of the reasons why Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. But recently things seem to be getting from bad to worse. During the recently-held SSC examinations, we witnessed cheating on an unprecedented scale. At some centres, even teachers and parents were helping the students to defraud the system!

But that is just one aspect of the problems facing the country's educational system. The "disease" has gone so deep that ordinary students like myself with our whole lives ahead of us, feel bewildered and helpless. But what is going on in the education field?

Being a third-world country, Bangladesh does not possess a good educational system. We have to pass primary, secondary and higher secondary exams and then go to universities. But most of our children in rural areas can't even have the primary education due to poverty. As a result, the percentage of literate people in our country is very low, only 23 per cent. Among them, only 13 per cent can write properly.

In schools and colleges, the effect of private-tuition is quite alarming. Many students are studying under two or three private teachers, some have as many as six or seven, whether it is a student of final year in college or a child of play-group in kindergarten.

In many places of the country, kindergartens are growing like mushroom and it is now "a flourishing business". These kindergartens do not follow the curriculum of the Bangladesh Textbook Board and so they are choosing textbooks by themselves. But some of these books have proved to contain material that are not conducive to the interest of our state and religion. In England and many other advanced countries, children play in playgroups and earn some basic humanities. But in our country, kids go to playgroups dragging huge bags on their backs, not much less heavier than themselves, which are full of books.

The prices of text-books and writing paper are going up so fast that we have to wonder whether we can go on with our studies further. The Textbook

Board, one of the main controllers of the education field of our country, is also showing the guardians and the students some magical tricks. In the past, our parents and even some elder brothers and sisters could use the same text-books as their elders had read. So, they didn't always have to buy new books every year. And it was really a great financial relief to their guardians. But at present the Board is not going to let it pass so easily. They are changing books every year even the alteration involves only a few mathematical sums or two or three questions or a hopeless chapter.

Keys to textbooks are well known to guardians and students. According to the way of studies in the country, if you want to do well in the exams, you should read a lot of notes and learn them by heart. In the examination hall, all you have to do is to copy out the notes on the answer sheets like parrots. The students are collecting notes from note-books or from better students and following them intently. The Education Minister has banned all kinds of note books relating to school syllabus upto class eight. But even a student of class four can get it easily from the stationery shops. As the days are passing by, note-books are becoming more popular and eagerly sought after than the main textbooks.

Guardians are pouring out nearly half of their monthly income to pay their children's educational expenses. Even when students come out from universities after an expensive study, they can't always get a respectable way of living. As a result, they become frustrated.

But everybody, especially young students like myself, know the country will suffer in the long run if the situation persists. It is in our national interest to not only arrest but reverse the current counter-production trend. We need, Bangladesh needs, a system where education really means education, and where a degree once again becomes a valuable symbol of academic achievement. For that to happen, the efforts of headmasters and principals will not be enough. All the students and guardians should do their utmost to make that effort a success.

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