

Cadet Colleges

Among the few institutions which, in the midst of the recent upsurge of campus unrest, have served as standards of peace, Bangladesh Cadet Colleges rank high. They are the only ones which have so far been able to maintain a much higher degree of discipline and consequently a higher standard of instruction than ordinary schools and colleges. It is thus a matter of considerable surprise that a demand should have been voiced, albeit by a small group, for their abolition.

Why they should be under attack is not exactly clear, but we have heard it said now and then that they are elitist in character and promote the growth of a privileged class. Nither complaint has any factual basis, unless someone is wild enough to suggest that the fact that they have not been vulnerable to the infection of indiscipline should be a charge against them. The charge of elitism is easily disposed of when it is remembered that the majority of the boys, selected after rigorous tests of merit, are on scholarships, that is to say, they are not recruited from privileged homes but represent academic merit wherever discovered. Nor have we heard of graduates from cadet colleges receiving extra status solely on the ground of their attendance at these institutions.

The syllabus cadet college students study is also the same as elsewhere. It is the manner cadet colleges are run which distinguishes them from ordinary schools. Even the fees charged are not any higher than in many private schools, which do not provide half the facilities that cadet colleges consider indispensable.

We are fully aware that the cadet colleges have not been able to remain untainted by the general decline in educational standards all over the country. They have to recruit their teaching staff from the universities where, regrettably in the last few decades, the standard of discipline and instructions, has not been all that it should be. But this drawback notwithstanding, we are convinced that on the whole these colleges are performing a useful service, doing a good job, in instilling among some adolescents, a sense of higher academic and ethical values.

We are constrained to enter into this elaborate defence of the cadet colleges not in order to argue that they do not have imperfections, but because the greatest need of the hour today in Bangladesh is an improvement in the quality of education. Falling standards in education are threatening to reduce the country to an abysmal level of ignorance and so cheapening our university degrees that sometimes they do not appear to be worth the paper they are printed on. We are not alone in apprehending that unless things improve, no sector of our life, administration, social, economic and cultural, will remain unaffected. The accent in educational planning in future should be on quality and quality alone.

That there is a widespread hankering after quality is symptomised by the rise of a large number of private institutions which in the name of quality fleece parents and are run really as profitable businesses. These undoubtedly need to be controlled and subjected to some carefully laid-down regulations. But cadet colleges which from the start have been state-regulated institutions do not belong to the same category.

What is well worth examine is whether the model they, that is, the cadet colleges represent, could be reproduced on a wider scale. Again, we are not suggesting that they are perfect. But they do exemplify something which with its emphasis on order and discipline and quality, could perhaps help us discover a solution to the nagging question of academic indiscipline at even higher levels. In any case the notion that the cadet colleges, because of their nomenclature are an alien graft which should be discarded, needs to be combated.

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