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DHAKA UNIVERSITY: FALLING STANDARDS

The Dhaka University's platinum Jubilee functions have begun. The inauguration of these ceremonies started from 21 September and drew a large number of former eminent students, teachers, DUCSU leaders and ordinary students who gathered together to recollect their memories associated with the Dhaka University as well as the university's glorious tradition.

Dhaka University, when it was set up in the first quarter of the present century, symbolized the hopes and dreams of a backward community. The Muslims of East Bengal were a condemned lot and their educational needs were hardly met. The favoured Hindu gentry in Calcutta, where undivided Bengal's educational facilities were too heavily concentrated, used to look down upon the education imperatives of East Bengal claiming that this part of Bengal was mainly rural and therefore hardly needed modern education. Distinguished personalities from Dhaka's Nawab family first showed a spirited resistance to this mentality and they were joined in their efforts by other sections of the Muslim intelligentsia. The British had partitioned Bengal in 1905 to accommodate the special demands of Muslim Eastern Bengal. They had to annul this partition only after six years in the face of strident opposition to the plan by Calcutta based Hindus. The British, as a sort of making up to hurt Muslim sentiments, decided to set up an university in Dhaka. But this was not a small gift as later events so resoundingly proved.

The Dhaka University, set up in 1921, played a great role in the creation of an educated Muslim elite in these parts and the same elite turned into a spearhead of this region's emancipation from colonial bondage with its Islamic identity intact. Conditions of East Bengal, prior to the setting up of the Dhaka University, was pathetic in the sphere of higher education. But Dhaka University within a few decades of its existence completely changed the picture. The standard of education in Dhaka University in that period was rated as quite high and it produced a continuous stream of well educated youngmen and also women who could be counted as assets by any nation. Indeed they proved to be so after the attainment of a new state in 1947.

In the post-partition period, Dhaka University continued to play a similar vanguard role in various intellectual movements. The historic Language Movement of 1952, the harbinger of the independence movement of Bangladesh, was triggered mainly from the Dhaka University. Later, in the movement for democracy and in the winning of the politico-economic rights of Bangladesh in the sixties, Dhaka University played a similar role. Dhaka University was much in the limelight during the independence struggle.

Some of its teachers gave intellectual leadership to the movement and many of its students formed the hard core of freedom fighters who fought in the armed struggle for the liberation of Bangladesh.

Dhaka University therefore had a tradition of politics during many phases of our national existence and the same was justified in the national interest. But in the present situation one is led to thinking whether continuation of this political tradition in the same unchanged form is either desirable or feasible. For it was witnessed in recent years that corrosive student politics had been a main feature of the university that led considerably to the destruction of its academic environment. Frequent outbursts of political violence in the Dhaka University campus seriously hazarded the study atmosphere, disrupted courses and examination and created serious session jams. To these ills of the university have been added also the indifference and callousness of some teachers. Dhaka University once enjoyed renown as the "Oxford of the East". But no longer. They have been allegations lately from responsible quarters that Doctoral and M. Phil programmes of the Dhaka University are poorly supervised and even the subject matters of such high research are casually selected. Devoted teaching is receding more and more from the university and the mentality of some teachers for outside money-making schemes, is mainly responsible for this. The brain drain caused to the university as a result of many of its senior teachers not returning and joining work after scholarship works abroad, is also proving to be a major factor behind the steady decline in the university's academic standards. The present crop of teachers are found embroiled in student politics and much of this politics is very petty.

Dhaka University's observation of its platinum jubilee is all right. But the occasion should lead to some soul-searching by everybody involved for a cure of the university's growing ailments.