

### **Vocational Education**

The government is reported to have decided to introduce agriculture as a subject for study in secondary schools.

The proposal is designed apparently to give a practical or vocational bias to the sort of instruction that our children receive, which is, as things are, much too academic. Properly implemented it should correct an imbalance which has come in for a great deal of criticism.

But it is the details of the syllabus or programme which will determine its usefulness or effectiveness.

If agriculture as a subject meant only memorising the names of crops and vegetables, learning in the abstract about methods of cultivation or the seasonal rotation which the plant world seems to follow, this would be hardly different from syllabuses on geography.

What our children need is practical knowledge, and that for a number of reasons will be difficult to impart unless certain conditions are fulfilled.

Each school must have a plot for experiments. This may be possible in the case of village schools but will it be possible for schools situated in urban areas to have an allotment of this kind?

Assuming that this were possible, the next question is: what will the girls do? If each school had a plot for cultivation, a pair of bullocks, a plough, and, if the pupils could be motivated to participate in actual tilling, sowing, reaping and harvesting, could this be insisted upon for both sexes? Perhaps not.

That is not the end of the perplexities which might arise. Who will market the crops or vegetables raised? Will staff and students be permitted to consume what they produce? That would be an excellent incentive, but will it work in practice?

Many of us remember how Lt General Azam Khan, when he was governor of East Pakistan, had the same idea about the need for a vocational bias in education and gave the University of Dhaka plots for use for this purpose on the city's authorities. We do not know whether the University still owns those plots, but we recall that the project proved a total failure when it involved ferrying students in the morning to the fields and ferrying them back. Few volunteered to take up the work seriously, and we believe the University had no experiences of actually harvesting a crop.

It is on these details that the success of the new idea will depend.

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