

Many Find Politics By Teachers And Students On Campuses Harmful

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It was July 20, 2003. A student procession was brought out from Aporajeyo Bangla (Dhaka University's Arts Faculty Building). The marchers were chanting various political slogans. Suddenly, a trouble broke out. The campus virtually turned into a battlefield as the marchers and their rivals chased each other.

The incident was covered well both by the print and electronic media. Tanim Ahmed, a first year student, was one of those who took part in the procession. His parents were shell-shocked as they saw his son in TV news.

According to his parents, Tanim is a mild-natured boy and not fit for the unhealthy student politics. Now Tanim's parents are always worried about their son.

Explaining the reasons behind his involvement in politics, Tanim says, "Student leaders force first year students to join processions. I'm just a victim. Forget about student politics. What would you say about teacher politics? Their politics is harming the academic life of students in many ways."

Anamika Biswas, a third year student of Rokeya Hall, says, "After admission, it took time to have a bed in a dorm legally. Then, I met a student leader to help me out. She agreed to help me on condition that I'll join the rallies and processions of her party. As I badly needed a place to live in, I agreed and ultimately got involved in politics."

According to Anamika, many rooms in their dormitory are in the grip of student leaders. Designed for four, one room has to accommodate 10-15 students. The hall administration is aware of this practice but keeps mum because of the power of politics.

Let's talk about Mizanur Rahman of Zia Hall, a master's degree student. He has been sharing his bed with another

student for six years (since first year). But, so many students of first year have got single room because they are involved in politics. Mizan talked to the house tutors about this but didn't get any help.

"Sadly, teachers themselves are involved in party politics. And they are appointed as provosts and house tutors based on political affiliation. Therefore, they don't take any actions against the malpractice by the student leaders," says Mizan.

In an article published in Daily Prothom Alo on May 9, 2007, Sheikh Hafizur Rahman, an assistant professor of Dhaka University's Law department, mentions that student fronts of two major political parties are doing nothing but blindly following their mother organisations. They simply imitate like parrots the words of their leaders.

He says the main tasks of the leaders and workers of these two student fronts are to shout slogans in favour of their leaders and keep the residential halls under control. Since 1991, student politics has been so bankrupt that leaders of these two student organisations have to take the common students to their processions by force after locking the collapsible gates.

About the conduct of student leaders, Sheikh Belal Hossain, a fourth year student residing in Mohsin Hall, says, "From dawn to dusk, student cadres exercise their power in many ways. They have free meals from canteens. They always keep the guestroom under their control. They act like guardians of the common students. Besides, they force common students to join rallies and processions in return of beds in dormitories. Students are also forced to guard hall gates at night."

On the existing student politics and teachers' responsibilities, assistant professor Shariful

Islam, a house tutor of Sir A F Rahman Hall, says, "Teachers should behave rising above party politics. Students are supposed to try to have solution to different educational problems through student politics. But, they get involved with student organizations and dominate the common students."

Rawfun Basunia, the then general secretary of Surya Sen Hall Chatra League, was killed on February 13, 1985 in firing by opponent student organization. Naturally, his father Nazrul Islam Basunia and mother Firoja Khatun still mourn the death of their beloved son.

Senior citizen Nazrul Islam Basunia, 76, says, "There was a time when student leaders used to take the risk of their lives for the cause of the country and the students. But, now students do politics for personal gains."

Laila Ferdous, a guardian worried about teacher-student politics at public universities, says from time to time campuses get stormy due to political reasons. Recalling some tragic incidents on the campuses, she says due to the volatility at the public universities she got her only daughter Lopa Ferdous admitted to a private university.

According to sources at DUCSU and proctor's offices, some 75 people have been killed on the Dhaka University campus since the country's independence. Among them, one is a teacher, few are outsiders and the rests are meritorious university students. From July 2001 to mid-October 2001, Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal enforced strikes for 64 consecutive days in Dhaka University. During the period, about 500 examinations were postponed. From November 19, 2006 till the proclamation of emergency on January 11, 2007, Bangladesh Chhatra League enforced strikes for 41 days. During the period, 434 scheduled examinations were post-

poned, worsening the session jam.

Shimul, an MSS student of Political Science, says, "Teachers participate in their elections under Red, Blue and Pink banners, which only exposes their political affiliations. And a student enjoys a good relationship with their teachers only when he supports his teacher's party. This aspect has an influence on results, which later influences recruitment of teachers."

Evaluating the present and past student politics, Awami League presidium member Matia Chowdhury, once a firebrand student leader of Dhaka University, says, "In our time, teacher-student relationship was like that of father/mother-child relationship. Now time has changed. So has the teacher-student relationship. The relationship between teachers and students has become somewhat mechanical."

Supporting student politics, she says, "Student politics will remain. But, students will have to play a leading role in getting rid of the moral erosion of the time." Matia emphasizes the need for mutual respect and love for the reforms of student politics.

Shedding light on teacher-student politics, Dr Dalem Barman, a teacher of Dhaka University's Peace and Conflict department, says, "In our time, we used to do politics in the interests of the students. The role of students in different movements like of 52, 71 or 90 was simply enviable. We do support healthy and constructive politics of the past pursued by teachers and students in different national issues. However, we don't support the bad politics of the present time being pursued by students and teachers. This has to be stopped in the greater interest of the country's education," he says.

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