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The Education Divide Creating Social Divides

We have written often about the mess in the education sector. Now we have more statistics to prove this because about 1.34 lakh students who have passed the SSC exam this year will not be able to find seats in colleges. The total capacity of our 3,000 plus colleges is 4.3 lakhs whereas a total number of 5.97 lakhs passed the exam. The top colleges in the capital have about 10,000 seats but the number of GPA-5 scorers alone are more than 25,000. In other words the increase in the number of educational institutions has not kept pace with the increase in the student population.

That there is a dearth of good colleges is evident from the throng of students seeking admission even for the moderately good colleges in the capital. With thousands of students vying for a place in a handful of reputed colleges of the country, the competition for admission has become fierce. Only a handful of well-known colleges in Dhaka will be able to take some 10,000 students from among the 35,000+ that secured the perfect grade point. Outside Dhaka there has not been any significant effort to raise the standard of education in schools and colleges in the rural areas although it is established that education, coupled with health, play a pivotal role in raising the living standard of people.

When educational institutions in rural areas lack resources and qualified teachers to ensure students can attain a minimum level that would enable them to compete at higher levels, it can come as no surprise that rural schools are falling behind urban areas in terms of standards. Of course many of these institutions were reportedly established to serve the political interests of influential individuals, therefore these schools couldn't serve the purpose of imparting education. Successive governments' apathy towards schools and colleges in the periphery has only succeeded in turning the education system into a tool that has perpetuated the appalling inequity that is prevailing among the people. If individuals have to be at certain locations and wealthy enough to be able to buy education for their wards, it is a serious reflection on the ability of the state to provide.

Having three different streams of education at primary and secondary levels does not help. The three streams are Bangla medium, English medium schools and madrasahs. Most Bengali medium schools, with the exception of a handful, are poorly run. This leads to the current scramble we see for admission to the English medium schools. But such a divide in education cannot be good for a nation bent on providing standard education to its people.

Madrasah education is popular among a certain group of people because it lays emphasis on religion which many feel to be lacking in other schools but the lack of emphasis on physical sciences and other subjects that help to create the kind of human resource a nation needs in the 21st Century often excludes students from getting ahead in the modern world thus many educationists feel the need for integrating the three systems. But English medium schools will resist this because they focus on building up students for admission into colleges and universities abroad.

If education is not what it used to be, we have no one to blame but ourselves because instead of adopting new methods of teaching we depended on the traditional, textbook-oriented, teaching. But theoretical teaching has undergone vast changes in the advanced countries and those developing nations that adopted the new methods were able to improve the quality of their workforce and gain economic growth. In other words the whole concept of education has changed and is today conceived as a training centre for future manpower resources.

The scope for acquiring need-based technical and vocational education in the country is insufficient compared to the demand. There are emerging sectors in the economy that have created the need for specialised education but opportunities are very limited, notwithstanding that the acquisition of specialised education has a vital linkage with the expansion of these prospective sectors. Thus the case is very strong for the government to reorient its policies in favour of broad-basing the education system. Just a look at the education sector would convince anybody that it lacks a policy direction. Obviously the important aim of having an educated and skilled population has not found a place in the thinking of those who run the affairs of the state but the education divide is creating social divides and eradicating this is important.