

"A teacher and bigger than bigger"

by Farooque Chowdhury

THE shameful incident concerning a teacher in Narayanganj is a show of the reality society is passing through. There are humiliation, audacity of power, disregard to dignity and the rule of law, bigger than bigger power of manipulation. There are increasing awareness about the sense of dignity, media's alertness, protest and efforts to resort to law. It is a vibrant society with forces of forward-moving change and backward pulls.

It is almost impossible to find out a single instance of a colonial British officer imposing such an indignity on any teacher in the colonial period in this land as happened in Narayanganj. A poem was in the syllabus of primary education during the pre-1971 days in this land, which described a Mughal emperor's respect to a teacher. These references — colonial rulers and emperor — are not a praise of those rulers. These help compare and gauge changes over a long period, help estimate role of power and identify equations in society. A deeper look gives a deeper insight also.

The humiliation of a teacher in Narayanganj is not an isolated incident. Months ago, another teacher was humiliated in an examinations hall by a petty officer. A court of law moved on the incident. But the incident broadly went unnoticed. Teachers, especially teachers from public educational institutions, are ridiculed. A few years ago, an opinion column in a news outlet unashamedly ridiculed teachers from public educational institutions. Another opinion column, a few months ago, tried to find out 'bargaining chips' of public university teachers on the issue of their salary structure while the teachers were fighting for dignity. That opinion column was a brazen attempt with indignity. Even in the present Narayanganj incident, an opinion column tries to describe it in a sectarian way, which is a two-way saw in today's Bangladesh. No responsible opinion column will resort to such sectarian act as sectarian approach hurts all in broader society.

It appears a reality, where it is easy to ridicule teachers, to mock teachers, to bash teachers and to humiliate teachers. It will not be astonishing if more incidents of teacher humiliation and trading with teachers' indignity

get unearthed. But the audacity that humiliates teachers, that mocks teachers and that ridicules teachers does not feel ashamed as it considers itself bigger than bigger. The reality, it seems, is ruled by audacity.

But humiliation and indignity are not lesser issues in life. These are, rather, a few of the basic issues that always confront humanity. Humanity never retreats on issues related to dignity and honour as life without dignity is worse than death. Teachers are essential part of life. They, broadly, facilitate igniting fire of creativity in human brains. Even, in a narrower sense, they help build up working hands for machines of status quo as they are to work within the system. So, neither status quo, if it is matured and responsible, nor forces with dreams for a new horizon can ignore teachers.

There are broader issues apart from the humiliation and indignity of a teacher. The issues are related to society, which is neither dead nor dumb, but occasionally behaves in a 'strange' way. But the 'strange' ways are not actually strange; they are, rather, a show of existing reality. These are the normal in a particular phase in a society. A look at broader society provides the explanation.

In this society, like all societies, money power creates the leading values. These, consequently, shape and influence views of major part of society. Senses of dignity and indignity, truth and lies, honour and dishonour, benevolence and malevolence, donation and loot, creativity and copying, judgement and misjudgement, and many of the sorts cannot escape the major force in economy. Money power creates propaganda power in a general condition. Doing and undoing a lot, making and unmaking wishes and desires, however unruly those might be, turn mere games to those powers. This reality makes a teacher or teachers helpless unless they stand united while the power of audacity or money power can mobilise a lot — from manufactured facts to placard-waving hired persons in large number to 'witnesses' to hired columnists to killing of news to wrongly formed logic and mal-arguments to the manipulation of public opinions. Any system powered with least organised and immature money interest cannot escape the reality, a seeming absurdity, unless people stand united to widen their democrat-

ic sphere. But it is not a reality with absurdity. It is a reality standing on an appropriate base.

The absurd appearing reality turns more complicated, or crooked, when stocks with seemingly laughing materials continue to surface and face no question. A brief background is needed. In France or England or the United States, the founding fathers of their democracy were not taught with democracy in their childhood days. Their childhood days were full with childhood — its imaginations and dreams, its plays and games and appropriate studies. Their gradually increasing connections to specific interests, knowledge, education and experience made them warriors or sentinels or founding fathers or theoreticians of democracy. Schools in France were not organising mock elections and parliaments with practices of democracy before the people their stood for democracy. The same goes with other countries. Mangal Pandey was not taught rebellion during his childhood days nor was MK Gandhi taught non-violence movement in his school. The same goes with others. But, today's Bangladesh finds parliament elections at school level with the holy motive of teaching the school kids parliamentary democracy. Were those hirelings resorting to violence during elections at local level during their school days? Were the leaders hiring those elements taught violence in their schools? What happens to the democracies that do not have such 'beautiful' programmes? The emergence of concepts on democracy and the concepts going to practice are not that simple that those can be taught at school level.

Broadly, the same moves with so-called kids — or juvenile — journalism. Were today's famous editors or reporters in this country or that country taught journalism during their school days? Is journalism that easy that a school student can practice? Is not learning at least a few relevant laws is one of the elementary parts of learning before practicing journalism, even if that is amateurish, although journalism like other professions keeps no space for amateurishness.

Has any question been raised on the issues? Everything moves on smoothly, everyone is happy, I'm happy, he's happy, a happy good day.

But the reality tastes slightly bitter when a Dhaka-based daily newspaper

reports (citing the report softly, and avoiding the issue of a corrupt practice mentioned in the report): A few seniors from a group of professionals, important professional group for the state machine, cannot properly or correctly follow rules of their business or draft important proposals placed before higher authority although the proposals are related to important business of the state. Their level of efficiency is also being questioned. (Ittefaq, May 18, 2016) Has this level of efficiency grown up overnight or out of zero? Was there no nourishment to the production of inefficiency? What is or where is its root? The republic, and the public, pays not a bad amount of money, and not a bad quantity of perks to the professional group. Moreover, the public including teachers do not dishonour assuming postures of the group.

But, at last, on occasions, what happens? Experience with humiliation? Teachers are part of the public. The reality, thus, does not spare the teachers: today, in this school; yesterday, in that examinations hall; the day before yesterday, in an opinion column; and on another occasion, has to raise voice to remind others of the issue of honour of teachers.

Positive developments are growing up: media are positively active; teachers have promptly taken a stand on the issue, social and cultural activists have stood by the teacher, ordinary students spontaneously raised their voice on the Narayanganj teacher incident. A major alliance of political parties has stood by the humiliated teacher. The High Court has promptly taken measures. On the opposite, a few interests try to depict the act of humiliation with a different version while lethargically inactive is that part of student activism, which claims that it stands for the ordinary public. Is it shameful? Coming days shall issue the verdict. It is a show of a part of society — its equation of power, its awareness, its influence on activism and senses. But questions shall remain: shall the honour be restored? Shall not the weak weep in silence? Coming days shall give answers to the questions.

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