

The system of education and basic issues

The last decade was a decade of no decision for national issues in Bangladesh. But the caravan of development went on with the horsepower of 'pragmatism' that could pull in all directions, including the reverse. Since last March, there has been pronouncements about a new era with new beginnings in which decisions on national issues are assumed to be fundamental. Finding answers for the evaded issues of the country's educational system is thus naturally one of the basic areas of decision making by national leadership at this critical point of time in the history.

In the Third World, as we all know, education is treated as a level of the development process and an integral part of development strategy and hence of planning policies. Gunnar Myrdal who did massive research work as "An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations" in South Asia, has given his own insight in these words: "The educational problem in South Asia has to be thought out anew, taking into account social conditions in the countries concerned and their quest for development. But such an analysis can never yield the neat and definite conclusions of medical technology: to stamp out illiteracy is a vastly more complex task than to eradicate malaria." (Asian Drama, p. 1624) He has assessed the situation in the post-independence days for the many countries of the region in a statement like: "The winning of independence has not worked any miraculous change in the people and their society. The existing educational establishments are part of a larger institutional system, which includes social stratification; and this system is supported by people's attitudes, which themselves have been moulded by the institutions. In general, the reforms needed are both different in nature from and far more radical than those suggested by the popular slogan of increased 'investment in education' which has been given currency by economists who recently hit upon the idea that education has something to do with development." The South Asian peoples are not merely being insufficiently educated; they are being miseducated on a huge scale. And there are important vested interests, embedded in the whole attitudinal and institutional system, that resist or warp policies intended to overcome both de-

ficiencies."

The above assessment can represent a broad perspective about the serious deficiencies of 'the attitudinal and institutional system' of the whole region, including Pakistan (which was then West and East Pakistan). With the emergence of Bangladesh out of a liberation war, the trends of reliance on the traditional system of education did not change. With complete disregard to the requirements of a new philosophy and reflection in the content of education, possible expansion in the production of some technical manpower along with the continuing predominance of aimless general education became the objective of 'development expenditure' in the education sector. Struggling for obtaining a misconceived higher priority only in terms of higher expenditure was the cornerstone of policy in the whole exercise of foreign-aid-dependent development planning. This was despite the strong statement of the socialism-oriented First Five-Year Plan (1973-78) which said, "Education must be responsive to the specific requirements of the nation. It must have relevance to future work and life, and must provide adequate preparation for productive employment". In the midst of political crises and lack of solution of outstanding national issues (e.g. nationalised industries, land reforms, administrative reforms, education reforms etc.), the transitional Two-Year Plan (1978-80) and the Draft Second Five-Year Plan (1980-85) could only aim at a mopping up operation for the continuing development projects, which themselves had to be eventually subjected to some order of budgetary control. Naturally, thus, not only the opportunities of building the foundations of a new beginning for the appropriate national sense of education for socio-economic development have been lost, but meanwhile additional obstacles and constraints had been permitted to grow with tremendous wastage of resources.

Wastes are obvious in many forms and staggering statistics speak eloquently about them. To take the instance of the few basic statistics used in the introduction of the recently circulated Questionnaire on Education Policy, one can easily find that in primary education, 75 per cent of children enrolled in class I drop out in reaching class V; out of a total community of 80 to 82 lakh

students, nearly 40,000 or 6 per cent pass the HSC examination and 0.25 per cent get opportunities of technical education; and out of literate population (with 12 years or more of education), 40 per cent are not in employment. The even from the narrowest point of producing some literate manpower required by the economic system of the country, the continued education system could so far produce continued wastes of enormous magnitude, both in terms of national physical and financial resources, and also of available talents and manpower. Other social costs are also tremendous; these appear in the form of what the unemployed consume and do against social benefit or economic welfare and also what the 'mis-educated' people do against rightly-conceived social benefit and economic welfare. These latter two types of social and economic costs are not estimated by planners or economists in their exercises of cost-benefit analysis. There is another set of wastes and costs which can be identified when the dimension of sense of direction and the value system relevant to our nation is applied. Lack of solution of the outstanding national and ideological issues so far provided these opportunities of social, cultural, ethical and economic costs against our society. Traditional education and the environment of lack of solution of those issues can be held responsible for a tremendous invisible iceberg of waste and negative social behaviour of the products of education; and these also produced further amounts of negative social value through 'demonstration effects'. All these different types of wastes and costs have led to the present state of many-sided rapid deterioration; and anybody can point to at least social deterioration, economic deterioration and ethical-cultural deterioration.

The trend of deterioration has been aggravated, by three major elements. First colonial rule and Western model of socio-economic progress drew attention to the role of science and technology in speeding up the process of economic development, after independence in the new South Asian countries, including the continuation of the same impact in the Bangladesh case. Reliance on emphasis for science and technology as an accelerator of development in an uncoordinated manner brought about serious distortions, both

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in the process of economic development and in the process of development of a system of education. At the same time, foreign aid-dependence and technology-dependence tended to make teachers, educators and scientists lose sight of the need for a national cultural, scientific and technological identity. Secondly colonial rule found it necessary to neutralise the Muslim population in the Indian sub-continent from political consciousness through policies of 'divide and rule' and cornering them for a special incomplete life and incomplete system of education. The Madrasa system of education sustained this purpose and by and large excused itself from the path of philosophical rationalism, scientific enquiry, integration of science and technology and encouragement of innovations through research. Even after independence, such inherited traditions of incomplete education have been maintained in the name of Islamic education, although Islam has been and will remain a complete code of life and complete socio-economic as well as political system. This implied that the vested interests of a stratified society have been further vitiated by the two types of incomplete education. One type adopted as the modern education reflecting Western principles and ideas adapted to the situation as it grew under inspiration from colonial and post-colonial aid-givers (which ignored the need for preparing students for an ideology-led complete life) and the other type continued the old traditions of study of Islamic history, jurisprudence law, interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah and a modicum of issues related to modern life and problems of Muslim living (which ignored most of the dynamic elements of an education process needed for facing problems of economic, political, scientific and technological development for living in this country). Thirdly, pressure of population growth continued unabated while the trend of development of human resources, economic resources, financial resources, their distribution and methods of approach to planning problems on all fronts remained neglected, distorted and unsystematic. Man-land ratios deteriorated rapidly; poverty went on increasing very fast; inequality and inequity in wealth and income increased extensively at the cost of pauperisation of a large bulk of rural population; ostenta-

tious consumption rose phenomenally among the wealthy classes, especially in the cities; antisocial activities increased and obtained silent toleration; general erosion of ethical values received wide acceptance as an inevitable part of the world situation and trends; corruption at the cost of society increased tremendously with no serious individual and collective effort at controlling its sources of growth; foreign aid receipts increased the opportunities of corruption and concentration of wealth in the hands of urban-based modern-educated, outward-looking, money-making, enterprising commercial people. The increase in population implied intensification of the trend of pauperisation of rural people, as indicated in the rising numbers of landless, marginal and small farmers. The education system, if the two types of modern and Islamic institutional framework can be called a system, did not prepare anybody for solving much of the problems that were and are mounting at an alarming speed. The modern type has indeed added an aberration of thinking that poverty and all other problems might be sought to be reduced with a socialistic approach to production and distribution while the conceptual understanding of the approach is confined to very few explorers in a theoretical sense. And lack of understanding about the completeness of knowledge for all situations of life contained in the Islamic system makes them and their young followers hopelessly biased against religion and its claims. On the other hand, the Madrasa-trained Islamic enthusiasts may feel like winning the world with spiritualism alone. The philosophy of national education for Bangladesh must aim at the synthesis of the modern and the Islamic traditional approaches to train the sons of the soil who are Muslims.

RELEVANT PHILOSOPHY

Social philosophy, in the abstract, is of general academic interest to a curious mind. But an appropriate social philosophy for a given nation or society will certainly depend on acceptance of the people concerned. And this acceptance depends on the understanding of the relevance of the composite elements of the value system, evolved or evolving in course of the nation's struggle for achieving its goal of establishing its goal of establishing

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