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Crisis In Higher Education II

The paucity of textbooks could have been overcome quite easily. We have the Bengali Development Board before 1972 specifically for preparing books in Bengali for students at the tertiary level. In 1972 this Board was merged with the Bangla Academy which undertook to prepare textbooks in Bengali. A crash programme involving both the translation of standard works into Bengali and the preparation of original treatises in our mother-tongue was much talked about off and on. But any such programme was never seen in operation. The Bangla Academy is actually found to offer the potential authors of textbooks at the tertiary level (including the Honours and to post-graduate levels) the same remuneration as is offered to the authors of novels, short stories, poems and other branches of Bengali literature.

Consequently, suitable books that can be used as textbooks at the University level are not being published. The publication of such books, on account of their very limited market, cannot, in most cases, be a commercial proposition. As such, private publishing firms are not interested in publishing them. Bangla Academy could be the only agency to publish them. Since the Academy is not publishing books suitable for students at the University level, there is really nobody to publish them. As a result, students are deprived of the most natural facility they can legitimately expect to have in their pursuit of higher education namely textbooks in Bengali. Teachers at the University level are certainly qualified to write textbooks in Bengali. But incentives in terms of a suitable remuneration for their manuscripts are not being offered to them. Moreover, spending time for writing a book in Bengali instead of in English means sacrificing the prospect of some international fame, since writings in English are used beyond the frontiers of Bangladesh.

Certainly, Bangla Academy has got lots of other activities which are also useful. But we are mentioning the Academy here just because it is the only organization which can possibly help us in these days of crisis of textbooks for the University level.

By the way, lots of other things are also expected of the Academy which is a national institution. Among them is the publication of a good encyclopaedia in Bengali. This work is also urgently needed for quenching the nation's thirst for knowledge. And an encyclopaedia of a good standard is also a good means for promoting higher education. In fact, textbooks and reference books are hardly distinguishable when we consider education at the University level.

We have only four Universities for general education, two for technical education (one for engineering and the other for agriculture) and only the starting of an Islamic University where the education imparted will hopefully have an Islamic impression on its students as the hallmark. There is a genuine demand for higher education in our country. Since four universities have too few seats for accommodating all the candidates for admission, a few colleges have also been selected for teaching aspirants for both Honours and Master's degrees in a number of subjects. It appears that this decision has not been a happy one. Colleges entrusted with teaching at the Master's level, particularly, have to be well-equipped with competent teachers and good libraries. In spite of their glaring handicap on both these counts, they have been made to go limping with this heavy responsibility. It seems to us that it would have been more advisable to use the facilities in the small number of universities that we have for imparting education at the Master's level and beyond, if necessary by discontinuing their undergraduate programme on campus. Teaching at the undergraduate level (Pass and Honours courses) could have been the responsibility of colleges alone. For the problem of meeting the huge demand for education up to the Master's level an open University would be better solution than making some colleges go limping with master's programme.