



Educating the children

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WHY we send our children to school is a question I often feel like asking myself. Rabindrapath Tagore did not attend any school. So many great men followed his footsteps. But were they in any way less educated. The primary reason as I feel is to impart theoretical and practical education to them in every sphere through a disciplined system. Before the children receive education most of the parents are required to educate themselves in the art of bringing up children. Filial love and care can do miracle in shaping the life and destiny of children. According to Islam to properly bring up a child is an "Ibadat." It is indeed a Herculean task which needs to be backed up by enormous sacrifice and one who has achieved this is among those who are highly blessed. I am quoting below a few lines that I jotted down from a doctor's clinic. I am sure it will provide a guideline to many.

If a child lives with shame he learns to feel guilty, If a child lives with tolerance he learns to be patient, if a child lives with encouragement he learns to grow confidence, If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate, If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice, If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith, If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself, If a child lives with acceptance and friendship he learns to find love in the world.

Dedicated parents will have to make great sacrifice to achieve the goal and ultimate blessing of the Creator. So will need the dedicated teachers who toil hard to see their students crossing the hurdles one after the other to success. Parents and teachers have almost similar jobs to perform in respect of their children. Students and dedication and sacrifice are keys to their success.

The education which does not make a person a man is no education at all. Education starts from cradle to grave. At what age the child should be in a proper school is a debatable issue. Some say it is at the age of four, some say the child should not be in a school at an age earlier than seven. A Swedish teacher who made a research on the subject tells me that if a child goes to school at an age earlier than seven his mental development does not synchronise with his physical development and consequently he becomes dull. We see kindergarten schools have sprung up

like mushrooms all over Bangladesh particularly in its principal cities. It is a German word. Kinder means children and Garten means garden. Garden of children. Here the children are treated as plants of the garden where a teacher's job is to take a very special care to see these plants blossom. Kindergarten schools are for children between the ages of 3-6 years and teaching is done while the child plays. Children use their sense-organ and receive everything through highly sensitive antennae. To refine sense organ through sense training is the base of child education. To this has been added audio-visual training. It is a very highly specialised job and persons with simple B.A. or M.A. degree can never handle this.

It is for the Ministry of Education to step in to bring it in proper lines before it plays with the fate of our children and makes tons of money in the process. The quality of teaching has gone down to the lowest ebb. The parents are happy because their proteges come with bag full of books and heap of homework. They are happy because their children can name so many things and write a few words at the age of 3/4. But it affects them in the long run and as they grow up they lag behind in the run. Even to have got their children admitted into one of such mushroom schools parents are to run from pillar to post, waste time, money and energy. The child ever since his admission remain under constant pressure both at home and at school. The teacher does not teach him because he cannot give any individual attention, for the class is too crowded. The result is obvious. As he grows up he does not understand a thing and is compelled to memorise. He cannot write in his own language for he does not have a language other than the books. At home the parents live in fools paradise thinking that he has put his child into a school where he pays Tk 200/- as tuition fee and since he pays so much money as tuition fee everything will take care of itself automatically. A wise parent will not do a thing like that. He will run away miles from these mushroom schools. He will try to teach him at

home and try to form a habit of reading in the child by making it interesting.

We have inherited so many bad things from the British but even their worst enemy will agree that their system of education stands out as one of the best in the world. Karachi Grammar School was established in mid nineteenth century. On my return to Karachi in 1958, I had to wait for months to put my children in the school. At one point my wife thought that the children will not have any school education for months and years to come. Yes, I was selective and choosy. Big palatial building with air-conditioned school bus, etc., never impressed me. I was particular about two things. One, the method of teaching, two, how disciplined were the boys. I applied for admission of my son in to Karachi Grammar School. He was asked to appear for the admission test and after he had qualified for the admission, my wife and I were invited to discuss things with Principal, Rev Glazebrook over a cup of coffee. The interview lasted for about 30 minutes. After so many things were discussed Rev Glazebrook told me not to engage private tutors in for the boy for the tuition the school would be enough and further tuition would not be necessary. Moreover it would make the child very dependent. He said "Don't you think that because you have put your child in a good institution your responsibilities are over. The child out of 24 hours stays only 6 hours in the school and for the rest of the period he stays home with parents and the family and it is from them he will pick up everything good or bad. Finally, he told me "Beg, borrow or steal, inculcate the habit of reading in the child that will help him to achieve 75% of his goal. That was a school where individual attention was given to every student. One evening at a social event Principal Glazebrook while receiving the guests told my son (7-year old) addressing him by name not to use the gate meant for the guests as there was a separate gate for students. Imagine what it is to remember name of a student out of a total number of students exceeding one thousand. The School started at 8 in the morning but a student is required to be present at

7-45 a.m. In a winter morning 7:45 is rather early and because of the pampering of his mother he was late for two days and reached at 7:55 a.m. Next day a letter was sent to me. It said that the child was late for two days and if this would continue the authorities would think of removing the name from the roll. In the same school there was a teacher by the name of Mrs Turner. I saw her dealing with the young ones in her class. An embodiment of patience that she was, she was very motherly and affectionately fond of every one of her class, irrespective of caste, creed or colour. It is a rare quality today.

I had quite a difficulty in respect of admission of my daughter in a renowned convent. In November 61 she appeared for the admission test and had done well. The Mother Superior wrote to me saying that my daughter had done well in the test but due to certain difficulties she could not be accommodated. Probably the mother superior expected me to bribe her in the form of giving donation of a few thousand or possibly because that seat had gone to the daughter of someone in the higher echelon. I was very upset and there was just nothing that I could do. In or about mid December I wrote a letter to the Mother Superior of the convent school. I wrote Dear Mother Superior, kindly refer to your letter in which you had very kindly mentioned that my daughter had done well in the test but due to certain difficulties she could not be accommodated. Probably the seat that should have gone to her had gone to the child of someone in the higher echelons or to a ward of some one who had stronger strings to pull. As far as I know, Christianity also taught noble and human ideals but if that is the Christian spirit which you so boldly preach, God help you. Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year, Yours sincerely. In the 1st week of the following month i.e. January I received a letter from the Mother Superior requesting me to take the child for admission.

English as a subject has been in a deplorable condition in our country but Play Group, Nursery, Kindergarten, English medium schools have sprouted

like wild berries. In the school discipline is zero and quality of teaching is minus zero. What do we gain and where do we go? Why then our boys are allowed to apply for foreign scholarships? Why at all we request foreign governments for scholarships are points to ponder. English for that matter is taught by under-qualified teachers. As a result it is not taught well and students develop an aversion to it, students pick up wrong spellings and faulty construction. I have checked some of the homework books where correctly spelled words have been corrected with wrong spelling. When a student cannot write anything even a sentence in his own English he has to take the help of his memory. We find students memorising (commit to memory) page after pages before examination. Teaching is a very specialised sort of job and one can acquire this specialisation through various types of training. For moulding the younger students a lot depends on the parents and teachers. If the teacher is good, students do not lose interest however bad they are. This I have seen in my life. In our college days of late 30s our professor of Bengali Babu Janardan Chakravarty used to take our class on Wednesday's last period from 3.30 to 4.30 to teach 'Moghnad Bodh Kabya Canto VI', a very dry and drab subject. During the term of two years I did not see a single fellow student slipping off from his class. That reminds about a few incidents of Mr Subash Chandra Bose that I was told by his contemporaries. One day Mr Bose was trying to slip away from the class of a mediocre professor in Presidency College. A fellow student told him not to leave. Subash retorted saying that 'Subash does not stay in the class of those professors whose knowledge is limited.' Mr CR Das had two disciples in Bengal, one was Subash, the other was Subash, the one Bengal was proud of. Both were stars shining in the political horizon of Bengal. Some of my readers must have read that historical letter he had written to President Ayub Khan in 1961. Educated in Oxford he too hated British colonialism. Once while he was holding the chair of Chief Minister of Bengal in 1946 the Governor arrived 10 minutes earlier

for the Cabinet Meeting. Mr R.L. Walker, Chief Secretary, rushed to the Chief Minister to convey to him that the Governor had arrived. Mr Suhrawardy who was standing in front of the mirror said, 'Walker, still 10 minutes to go. Don't you see I am dressing. Please tell the Governor to wait. Only Mr. Suhrawardy could tell this. We all know how brilliant was Mr Subash Bose. While I was in Islamabad I had the opportunity of reading books at Pindi Gymkhana. Pindi was the headquarters of British Indian Army. There I read speeches and writings of Subash Chandra Bose. It was a piece of literature too. The way he exposed leaders of the stature of Mr. M.K. Gandhi and the like in his inimitable fluency and jugglery of words, is indeed praiseworthy. Again it was Subash Bose who had beaten Mr. Stapleton (I am open to correction if I am wrong) on the stairs of Presidency College for derogatory remarks used against the people of our sub-continent. Then again this Subash Bose was seen touching the feet of old teachers out of sheer reverence. For the British colonialists he was a fire brand militant person but was humble and respectful towards his teachers and elders. In our days also teachers earned respect, lot of respect because we got in return affection, sincere and dedicated teaching. Years after the country was divided in 1947, I met Babu Janardan Chakravarty who was then in Presidency College in front of Albert Hall. I touched his feet. He at once recognised me and held me in embrace for minutes as if he got back his lost son after a decade. I still recall those days when he used to teach us Tagores "Shahajan". Half of the poem was automatically memorised by 30% of the students without effort just by listening to him. However, bad a student may be, he always gives his uninterrupted attention to a good professor or teacher.

It is a pity that standard of education has gone down to the lowest ebb, Degree from Dhaka University is not recognised anywhere in the world. It is high time that maximum consideration is given to this sphere and an all-out effort is made to give at least a face-lift. Dhaka University was once upon a time full of luminaries radiantly shining on its horizon a university of which the whole of Asia could be proud of. It should be taken care of and its lost glory should be restored.

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