



Science Education and Our Womenfolk

By Razia Begum

In the modern world science and technology play a very important role in every sphere of life. The basic needs of life such as food, clothing, medicine and shelter, are becoming scarce owing to the ever increasing population of the world, specially in the Asian region. These problems can only be solved with more emphasis on science and technology.

A Bangladeshi boy or girl goes to school at the age of 4-5, and gets Master's degree after 16 years of study in school, college and university. This total course of study is divided into several stages, primary education (5 years), junior secondary (3 years), secondary level (2 years), higher secondary or pre-university (2 years) and University education or equivalent (4 years). The medical course however is of 5 years' duration.

TECHNICAL EDUCATION

By technical education we refer to a course which involves in addition to general education the study of technologies and related sciences, the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge related to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. But the students and their guardians prefer courses of study of academic nature, which may lead to the higher status professions. In the Second Five Year Plan of Bangladesh, technical education received third highest allocation, after primary and secondary education. Still Bangladesh is short of technical manpower. Number of female students admitted in the technical courses is insignificant. This is mainly due to cultural and social barriers and lack of courses suited to women's aptitude.

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

There are four general universities and two professional universities (University of Engineering and Technology and Agricultural University) in Bangladesh. Of these, Jahangirnagar University and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) are residential universities, and the rest are of affiliating type i.e. having constituent colleges under their jurisdiction for academic purposes. According to tradition, girl students concentrate

more in the general universities.

POPULARISATION OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

The aim of science is to expedite the overall development of society and as such it must bear relevance to society. It must establish a direct relation with human welfare. The new methods of science teaching gives particular importance not only to the development of an innovative mind. It also insists that the syllabi should be related to national issues and national culture. Higher education in science should aim to produce not only academicians but also expertise for the local industries and agriculture. Practical courses must be planned to help the students in their future life to find a job and to do that job efficiently.

The standard of science teaching in the higher secondary level and also in the Degree Pass or Honours level in the colleges is below the expected standard for general reasons. One of the important reasons is that, students do not get enough practical exercise. This is mainly due to lack of physical facilities. The recurring grants for the science departments at even the government colleges are very poor, not to speak of the private colleges. Additional physical facilities for science teaching in the colleges must be provided, particularly in the rural areas.

The success or development of any education system is largely dependent on the efficiency of the teachers. This is more true for science teaching. Teaching in Bangladesh has never been a lucrative job to attract talented people.

In Bangladesh, there are eighteen polytechnic institutes, including one for the girls, offering diploma level courses in the following fields of technology (i) civil (ii) electrical (iii) mechanical, (iv) power, (v) automobile, (vi) architecture and (vii) electronics. The 'Mohila Polytechnic Institute' is confined to courses in architecture and electronics only. This is indicative of the present reluctance of women to enter all technical fields, or rather the reluctance of the authorities to create such opportunities for them.

The College of Home Economics is the only institute of its kind in Bangladesh. It offers higher secondary, B.Sc. (Pass and Honours) and M.Sc. Courses in Home Economics. From 1985 the College has started B.Sc. Honours courses in the following subjects:

1. Food and Nutrition.
2. Child development and family relations.
3. Home-management and Housing.
4. Clothing and Textile
5. Related Art.

Of all the professional courses the highest concentration of women is in the medical course. It may be mentioned here that in the medical course thirty percent seats are reserved for the female students.

POPULARISATION OF SCIENCE

Highly developed education system may produce eminent scientists and this is necessary, but not sufficient for the overall development of society. If the general people are to get the benefit of science they must have at least the minimum awareness of science. Some of the critical problems of Bangladesh are low agricultural and industrial productivity, low rate of literacy, high birth rate and infant mortality, shortage of fuel and poor sanitation and health facilities. These problems will not be solved by the policy made by top rank scientists alone; their solution also requires minimum scientific knowledge and awareness of the people particularly of the women folk.

Regular interesting and illustrative programmes on science, produced on the national broadcasting services like Radio and TV, can create this awareness. Science exhibitions in rural areas can also focus the attention of the people on the applications of science in our daily life. Scientists should be encouraged to write popular scientific books and articles in Bangla. Vigorous programmes on national level should be taken up for translating into Bengali important and interesting scientific books from other languages.

Scientists should be arranged to explain the fascinating developments of science to the widest possible public. Finally, we must try to increase the rate of literacy. If we can

Contd on page 10

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