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# Kindergartens: Some Thoughts

—S. Ullah

ALMOST every month a new school is being set up in the city—all in the private sector. They go under the name of kindergartens. The word kindergarten, which is German, means children's garden. The very name suggests that here is a school which helps children unfold their talents as flowers unfold their petals and spread fragrance.

Visit any area you will come across more than one signboard indicating the presence of a garden where you can send your children to bloom. But a probe into these schools will show that in most cases these are anything but gardens.

You cannot force a bud to bloom. Pressed too hard, it will wither away. In most of these kindergartens the curriculum is much too heavy for the children. The concept of learning while playing is foreign to most of these schools. The children return from school carrying heavy home-tasks which take the whole day to prepare. Since they are not obliged to remain within the limits prescribed by the school, text-book authorities, they are free to introduce any book they deem fit. The books they select are not all that suitable.

There are two main reasons why guardians send their children to these private institutions though most of them charge rather exorbitant tuition fees: (a) Government primary schools, mostly, fail to impress the guardians as schools worth sending

their wards to and (b) guardians who want their wards to learn English well and from the initial stage of schooling feel kindergartens are what will fulfil this objective. But, unfortunately, not all kindergartens can fulfil this objective.

The fact that the kindergartens enroll large numbers of children at primary and pre-primary levels indicates that their absence would create a vacuum which government would fail to fill in. In a society where public investment, for various constraints, is only meagre, private initiative in any sector should not be discouraged; it should rather be encouraged. This applies more in case of education which is yet to be recognized by us as a productive sector. So it will be unwise to call for any restriction on the setting up of private-sector kindergartens. There is also little scope to think that bringing under government control the kindergartens set up by private initiative, will improve their standard. Under the circumstances, before sending a child to a kindergarten guardians should look into the educational facilities it offers; the books it prescribes and the subjects it introduces for various age-groups—and the teaching staff.

What is really painful is that guardians' expectation regarding the learning of English remains unfulfilled in many a case. Although most of these schools

offer vernacular—Bengali—the medium of education, the English books they teach are not quite suitable for non-English speaking pupils. Since English here is a foreign language, it should be taught as a foreign language. And there is a special way of teaching a foreign language. Written in the context of another society, the contents of these books remain largely beyond the children's comprehension. Designed for English speaking pupils, these books, language wise prove much too difficult for them. For instance even before they can read Bengali with ease they are expected to recite English rhymes. They recite these rhymes with great difficulty—for they cannot pronounce the words—and do so without understanding them a bit.

It should be pleasant to recite a rhyme. It has a dual purpose—rhymes help the child learn language and while doing so, it also helps develop its imagination. And nurturing the faculty of imagination is thought more important than formal teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic at the initial stage of schooling. But mechanical recitation of rhymes without understanding them are a meaningless burden that can only create a negative attitude to education with a long-term impact on the psychology of the young learners.

**IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH**  
 When there is a renewed awareness in society about the

need to learn English well, and when the kindergartens have taken the responsibility of offering education with special emphasis on the English language, interested guardians will feel relieved if the managements of these schools reassess their performance vis-a-vis English teaching.

Under the existing circumstances, kindergarten children, in most cases laboriously learn—memorise will perhaps be a more appropriate word—the contents of the books they are made to read but they hardly learn English. At least, the learning is far short of the guardians' expectation.

Since, as it seems, kindergartens have come to stay, it is only desirable that they stand on a sound footing and be an effective alternative to the government primary schools by evolving a uniform standard and a common curriculum comprising the right type of books.

Kindergarten managements could combine themselves in some sort of an association and set up a supervisory body involving guardians also. The task of such body could be laying down common rules and chalking out a common curriculum—integrating it with the nationally decided curriculum—and getting suitable books written on subjects left out by the text-book authority. For instance, English—a subject on which the Text-Book Board has no book for classes below class III.