

Educating Future Mothers

There is an Arabic proverb that indicates to the importance of educating women because she will become the mother who raises the next generation. People, including men, often repeat this proverb but few realise its significance but if we need to produce better equipped future generations it cannot be achieved without educating women. Napoleon recognised this when he said, "Give me an educated mother and I will give you an educated nation."

Mothers are in essence women regardless of their education level. If the society ignores educating women, this will lead to mothers who are illiterate and who will be unqualified to teach and educate their children. An educated mother is the reason for potential female doctors and teachers. But educating women is not just about producing female doctors or teachers it includes women in all their roles in the society, especially as a mother. Most women realise the importance of education. They want to improve themselves and develop their society.

Since 1993, successive governments of Bangladesh have been paying closer attention to girls and students in secondary and high secondary levels are now provided with financial help. Tuition fees up to HSC classes have been waived – this is a good sign – but the huge number of female children who are still out of schools needs to be brought into the formal education programme.

Education is important for both genders as educated people are a national resource and a treasure that every country wants. Quality education advances communities economically, politically, and culturally and since society is made of both men and women, it is important that both are well educated. However it is to be regretted that in Bangladesh women still suffer discrimination when it comes to educational opportunities as many people still associate education with boys only but although the perception about women's education is changing albeit slowly, no woman, no matter how educated she gets, still remains under male domination. They are not allowed the self-esteem a person needs to grow.

World leaders at a 2000 Summit pledged to eradicate the gender disparity in education by 2005 but this could not be achieved because of outdated sexual stereotypes and poverty. Many girls are denied education due to cultural traditions that define a woman's place as being in the home. Such social pressures are exerted on women at a very early age. With male privilege and entitlements ensured, and with educational opportunities limited, boys take up available classroom space as a right. But as UNICEF Executive Director Ann Veneman said, "education of children, especially girls, is the cornerstone to national progress." (and) "leads to greater economic productivity, reduced infant and maternal mortality, and a greater likelihood that the next generation of children will go to school."

If the idea of education is today measured in terms of whether the recipients can be counted upon to fulfill the manpower needs of the nation, the education system in Bangladesh must be deemed inadequate, outdated and sterile.

Although many of the poor have come to realise that education is essential to the future of their children, when mothers are illiterate, it becomes difficult for them to fulfill this dream. Moreover a lack of sanitation keeps girls out of school even if they have a desire to learn. In a country where poverty, tradition, and ignorance deprive so many girls of even primary education, the lack of school toilets and water is a major obstacle to girls' attendance.

However there is broad public recognition that education is the most effective route to individual mobility and we cannot afford to ignore this but despite the growing hunger for education, the rapid commercialisation of this sector has blocked the way for creating a progressive and democratic system. Educationists say the lack of financial ability of rural families, lack of facilities and quality of education are the main reason why girls cannot do well. So if we are to create a progressive and democratic nation, we must concentrate on education for girls even if some will become lost treasures. The children will at least benefit