

Feature

Education and Commitment

by Abul Ashraf Noor

As an old teacher I am much concerned with the morality in academic industry of the 20th-Century World. I strongly feel that our educational spectrum would try to do everything possible to achieve intellectual guarantee of human salvation for the advancement of modern concept of true education in a developing country like ours.

With my limited research findings I sincerely believe that the correct approach to the good life in the fast changing human societies seems to be the inter-relationships with one another in the vast chain of dialectic educational endeavours to reach the common goals set before us all today — nationally and internationally.

If we preach the totality of the interests of education in all dimensions, we must practise it in actual life. The question — "How to achieve the educational salvation within a generation to make a perfect community of human beings" — is constantly on our lips, but we shy away from the more basic and vital question of the times. We as teachers must be as concerned to promote co-operation between teachers of differing backgrounds as we are to bring together teachers with the common interests.

With this in mind, the following conditions may be of great value in recasting the green minds of the learners and consequently the existing pattern of education at all levels for the nation's future.

United teaching profession, economic security for all teachers, adequate financing for public education, fundamental human-rights for all teachers and pupils, leadership in solving social problems.

The important thing is that the above conditions are the bases for action and not the excuses for inaction. One should endorse the view that



Some World Vision assisted children of Maniknagar. — Photo: A Ajit Baroi

the teacher must be a 'moral crusader' in the educational miseries that deter the global development processes in true education for the developing countries of the world.

Through my academic investigations both at home and abroad, that relates to the overall development of the untapped human and natural resources for the attainment of good life in our resurgent

FEBRUARY is the month in which the people of this country takes renewed pledge to follow the ideals of the martyrs of the historic language movement. In this month, we talk about our dreams, our promise to the development of our language and we talk about education.

Bangladesh is the country majority of which can neither read or write. Eight million out of 11 million population of the country is illiterate. With such bulk of mass remaining uneducated, the country's trek to desired prosperity is near to impossible.

Literacy is yet another topic which has received minimum attention from the policy planners. Even much of the discussion in the month of February revolves round language and literacy, and not literacy.

This was viewed at a lively discussion on literacy situation of the country at 'Avimat' magazine programme of the Bangladesh Television on February 12. The programme was conducted by eminent journalist Muhammad Jahangir, Secretary of Primary and Mass Education Ministry Kazi Rakiuddin Ahmed, BRAC Executive Director Fazle Hasan Abed and editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam took part in the discussion.

Explaining the government's initiatives, Kazi Rakiuddin Ahmed said the term 'education for all' apply for both mass literacy and compulsory primary education. The objective of the

compulsory primary education is to bring the children from six to 10 years of age to the schools. Such measure would raise the country's overall literacy situation as well as control illiteracy among the adults. The Compulsory Primary Education Programme, through media campaign using radio, TV and cinema, aims at encouraging the parents to enroll their children in the schools.

The Secretary informed that this had improved the rate of enrolment at the schools in the rural areas of the country over the years. He said that the government was planning a survey to assess the rate. The programme was initiated in 1982 at 68 thanas on an experimental basis. Besides, school brigades, meetings, round-tables, mothers' rally were also being planned in the rural areas.

The government was also planning to assist the satellite schools run by community and madrasahs. Appointment of teachers to fill up the vacant posts and infrastructure development were also under consideration. The government's programme was 'flexible' and it could be amended or updated in future, he said.

Fazle Hasan Abed said that for a basic education for the country, the government should go ahead with its compulsory primary education programme. Compulsory Primary Education was also required for increasing the overall literacy rate of the country. The NGOs can only com-

A Round Table discussion was held on Saturday February 26th 1994 at Nijera Shikhi Boardroom, Road 10, Adabor, Dhaka, in which the following persons participated: From Calcutta: Dr Hossainur Rahman, Dr S K Basu Mallick, Messrs Syamal Mallick, Tapan Chakraverty, Samir Bose, Tushar Dalal and Samit Basu Mallick; from Dhaka: Mrs Mabud Fatema Kabir, Prof Khan Alauddin, Messrs Kazi Fazlur Rahman, Mujibul Huq, Sanjib Chowdhury, Chitta Francis Reberiro, Md Hanif and John Hastings (convenor).

The Convenor introduced the subject, speaking of the necessity for Education to take a positive role in the formation, maintenance and extension of culture. Whereas religion and politics assume dominant roles in this function, culture — which might be termed the visible part of a nation's soul — depends on other factors too, like history, geography, commercial interests and social relationships.

Thus there is a Bengali culture which is independent of the dominant religion of the area. But it sometimes seems that Education is denied a role, as though some fear that it will lead culture astray! Education itself has tended to specialise, opting out of the culture-building role, and failing to contribute what it should on a broad basis of cross-cultural understanding. The educational world seems to have gone over to the need for skills for economic survival or affluent living.

Education has become a matter of learning to succeed rather than to be. Yet an education which makes a person better, more cultured, is preferable to one which makes him or her richer in material things. Another error of our times is that we assume God has given us just on culture to enjoy and spread. In fact God has given us many cultures and we deprive ourselves of our human potential if we fail to receive one another's inspirations and revelations.

Dr Hossainur Rahman said that constant vigilance is necessary to ensure that education is not regarded as an academic exercise divorced from the cultural roots of students. Villages have both education and culture which is passed on to each generation. One of the functions of education is to liberate us; this includes liberation from sectarianism and cultural pressures which categorise and separate people in groups.

"Man belongs to man". Schools should recognise their duty to broaden the vision of students so they see themselves as enriched by the whole human family and potential contributors to the enrichment of the whole family. But sadly schools often cultivate self-centredness; this may derive either from emphasis on individual achievements or from emphasis on the local

plement or supplement to the government efforts. He explained that BRAC has evolved many innovative ways to basic education, much of which has been lauded by people from both home and abroad. Their programme was different from the government-supported programme. BRAC supplies books and all other educational materials to its six lakh pupils free of cost. The teaching takes place more inside the class and teachers can give attention to their students more than what is now usually being given at the state-run primary schools. Timing of the



Poverty often pulls children out of school. Failure of the school system to serve families' needs recognising this issue is one cause. This ranges from improper school timing to a school system unable to convince parents of its usefulness. Schools must become capable of meeting various challenges of life including poverty to be successful. — Courtesy Unicef

group-identity or from both. As TS Eliot proclaimed, a multiple culture is higher than a mono-culture. Whereas earlier styles of education were all-embracing, there is a tendency in modern education to specialise and so deprive students of breadth of vision.

There is nowadays strong pressure to succeed, to gain means of subsistence and saleable skills by selecting narrow disciplines at an early age, instead of aiming to become better, cultured people. Ideally, education should

stead of liberative, and some have realised they can only find God outside the religious structures. As one said, "Let me kill my God and I shall find my religion!" True religion, some would say, is to perform one's earthly duties.

Vivekananda said that it is to worship humanity. There is a need for education to be freed from the shrinking effects of formal religion. ("Buddhi mukti" — Viv.)

So redefinition of education is necessary. The posture needs to be adjusted: educa-

groups >> individuals). Affluence brings self-sufficiency and no further need of others. Thus Gandhi after Independence is not now jobless: he takes up the fight against the insularity brought about by sufficiency.

Mujibul Huq welcomed the call for deindigenisation of education and the need for broader culture, where the "extended person" is the goal of our living. A self-centred person or insular group is ipso facto uncultured.

Kazi Fazlur Rahman spoke of the judgement of the village on those who received education in the towns — "clever but not educated." In the West a person may simply pick a job like plumbing because it is well-paid — without considering the job-satisfaction or higher value of an occupation for which he is trained and capable. Education can work against education. Economists cannot function properly unless broadly educated. Living skills are too often neglected within a 'race' education system.

Mabud Fatema Kabir said that culture should not be something we think we can create artificially: it grows automatically. We fail to develop properly because we impose our own interpretations and twist the cultural components we are given. People choose selectively what they want out of religious statements. Thus we get distortions which are not real religion.

Sanjib Chowdhury drew attention to the sad effect of the pressures of a growing mono-culture in Bangladesh which had the effect of forcing Hindus out one by one. This is something relatively new. In earlier years it was accepted that there was room for all, but in many parts of Bangladesh now this no longer holds. This is a sad thing for all, not just for the minority communities. He further expressed the hope that universal education would produce more honest religious leaders, and accommodation for all which was a tenet of all faiths.

Chitta Francis Reberiro spoke of the attempts of Shikha Anirban Foundation over the past 12 years and Bangladesh Inter-religious Council for Peace and Justice (BICPAJ) to provide for all faiths and religions to come to a deeper and more creative cross-cultural understanding.

Hossainur Rahman emphasised the need for meeting. There were many transactions between human beings besides academic ones. Deindigenization of education is the only way forward. The scientific temper which Jawaharlal Nehru extolled is still 'along way from realisation in West Bengal, let alone East Bengal. Research into the development of Islam in the steps of Maulana Kamal Azad was one of the major needs of the world's cultural development.

Courtesy — Nijera Shikhi

NIJERA SHIKHI

Progress report — March 1994

FOLLOWING newspaper reports and advertisements in Bangla national dailies, 370 volunteers (40% of them women) have registered to work as Organisers and Learners' Hel-pers.

They are forming local committees and recruiting a further 1,600 volunteers to lead a prospective number of 23,678 illiterate people (55% of them female and 37% adolescents) to become functionally literate and then use Nijera Shikhi libraries for their continuing education.

This number is a one-seventh part of the current year's target. The local costs and the cost of materials to be supplied by Nijera Shikhi are being raised by the committees in various ways.

So far, 27 out of the 64 Districts of Bangladesh are involved, with the largest numbers of classes scheduled to be conducted in Kurigram (604), Sherpur (104), Gaibandha (75), Chittagong (79), Lakshmipur (56), Sirajganj (48), and Jamalpur (47).

Education officers are being asked to encourage and assist the voluntary teams, with the expectation that their efforts will generate a nation-wide popular movement to make Bangladesh a literate nation by our own efforts — "Nijera Shikhi".

Radio reports are expected to encourage the existing volunteers and new learners as well as to secure another 10,000 offers of voluntary service. The Government's appointment of Syed Ashraf Ali, Radio Bangladesh Education Director, to Nijera Shikhi's Board of Directors, besides being a token of the Government's confidence in Nijera Shikhi's contribution to the national drive for Education For All, is proving to be of considerable practical help to the company.

The Handbook for Children's Education Promoters has been prepared and will be available at the end of March.

Grameen Bank is working on a method of commending the Nijera Shikhi programme to its groups of clients. Most of the 1 1/2 million Grameen Bank users are women, and many of them already realise that functional literacy and numeracy is essential for them to make real economic progress.

Rotary, Loans, and other service clubs and agencies are invited to take advantage of the Nijera Shikhi system of cost-effective literacy programmes based on fast-learning, scientific methodology.

Nijera Shikhi has sold 3,400 Share Vouchers at Tk 100 and continues to offer them as a means whereby sympathisers can participate in the Programme. One Voucher represents the amount put in by Nijera Shikhi to enable the volunteers to help one adult or adolescent to become functionally literate.

prevent such evils as racism and sectarianism, yet these are rife in the world e.g. not only India's BJP but Britain's BNP. One of the anchors of education is Reason, and education cannot allow this to be thrown out by any nationalist or religious pressure or doctrine. Education must be de-indigenised.

Marshall McLuhan pleaded for "the extension of man", abhorring the vision of human beings being confined into narrow spaces and concepts. There are those for whom religion has been restrictive in-

tion should be the field in which we all meet. I must not disdain or disapprove of, but rather learn to respect the otherness of the person next to me in society who is different from me. This is part of the process which Paulo Freire calls conscientization.

There is value in the symbolism of the low stool for learning, close to the earth, rather than the high chair.

Alvin Toffler points out the need for integration and the dangers of "Power-shift" towards disintegration (Superpower >> Power >> Govt. >>

Avimat:

Everyone has to be Literate, But How?

BRAC schools is also important since classes may take place anytime of the day convenient to both the students and the teachers.

Mahfuz Anam said the government should give due attention to the education sector. New statistics have been spewing out, but in effect no actual development has

tween six to 10 years of age. Out of the total 69 are never enrolled in the schools. Another 59 lakh students drop out. Literally 49 lakh students complete their five-year study. The drop out rate is 70 to 80 per cent.

Much of the government allocation for education sector went for salary of the teacher, he said. For every 100 taka earmarked, taka 67 was spent as salary, taka 7.50 for furniture, taka 3.00 for books and other educational inputs, 0.50 paise for teachers' training, 0.50 paise for management supervision and taka 2.00 for infrastructure maintenance of the schools. In contrast, the BRAC model shows that the emphasis is more on educational inputs.

Quoting another study, he said out of the 365 days, only 440 hours were devoted for classes in Bangladesh while the figure was 750 hours in Sri Lanka, 750 hours in the Philippines, 1100 hours in Indonesia and 1200 hours in China. Mahfuz Anam also called for depoliticising the education sector for speeding up its pace. He suggested that the MPs can arrange literacy competition among the Jatiya Sangsad constituencies.

A total of 118 letters containing various suggestions from the audience were received. The categorised suggestions are as follows:

1. Education Extension Month programme can be arranged to launch a social movement. All educational institutions and the NGOs

Where shall I get books, copies and pencils?

by Onok Ali Hossain Shahida

REBECA and Rahela are two sisters born in close succession. Rebecca is aged five, Rahela four. Even at that age they have to work for a living. Walking through the streets of Faridpur every day they pick up the shed bokul flowers and string them together into garlands for sale. Each sells for a taka.

They live in a slum near Faridpur railway station. Their father Hiro Mia is a rickshaw driver with very meagre earnings. The two sisters therefore have to supplement the family earning by selling garlands. Both are keen to go to school but do not have the means.

"If I am given books, copies and pencils, I can go to school," says Rebecca.

There are countless children like Rebecca and Rahela in the slums of this country who lack the opportunity for education. Fortunately for them, Bangladesh Shiksha Academy has taken a project from the year 1993 to create educational opportunity for underprivileged children. Under the project the Academy plans to implement 13 developmental programmes, one of which is compulsory primary education.

The programme purports to bring the underprivileged children of the country under the coverage of education and to guarantee their basic rights. One of these 13 programmes is BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) School Education. Under this programme, children are trained so that they are eligible for admission into class one. Besides acquainting them with the alphabet, the right kind of aptitude for going to school is also being developed.

The effort of the Shiksha Academy that aims at implementing compulsory primary education in the country, will create an educational opportunity for the underprivileged children aged four to six years in 44 districts. Besides creating interest among these un-

derprivileged children about going to school, instruction is imparted in signing and dancing, drawing and cleanliness of environment.

These schools have started functioning from January 1993. Shiksha Academy has achieved substantial success in this one-year instruction. Golam Kibria, director of Shiksha Academy, says that children are being brought to school from different slum areas and books, copies and pencils are being supplied free of cost.

These children are taught three to four days a week. The students of Dhaka University and workers of different NGOs have come forward to offer their services as instructors. Some of them receive a small honorarium but many work without honorarium and out of pure altruistic motives. The objective of Shiksha Academy besides giving the children education, is to make them aware of their rights and to give expression to their unfulfilled desires.

About compulsory primary education Gias Kamal Chowdhury, Bangladesh correspondent for the Voice of America and special correspondent of BSS says: "For bringing every child under compulsory primary education we shall have to give a thought to the circumstances that prevent parents from sending their children to school. We must make the parents interested. The press, radio, TV and the NGOs can play a positive role in this."

Now the number of people in the age bracket 1 to 18 is about 50 million. The under 5 children number 18 million. Eighty-four percent of them live below the poverty line and are deprived of their rights from birth. They keep floundering in the quagmire of poverty. The endeavours of Shiksha Academy are aimed to save the children from this quagmire. If they succeed, the Rebecas and Rahelas, can go to school and dream of a beautiful future.



Issue: Primary Education: Maltibari Dagar Government Primary School in Kurigram an unconventional educational institute. It has been recognised as the best school for having a unique feature.

Apart from the teachers, the local educated youths work as volunteers to teach the students in two shifts of a day, i.e. morning and evening.

It is compulsory for students of class five to attend coaching classes in the evening. Some students from other schools in the nearby villages also attend the special classes.

Therefore the students do not need to hire teachers or do homework at home. Thus, the students are securing excellent results. The involvement of youths as volunteers has made positive impact on society.

—Photo: Rafiqur Rahman/Development Features

1. More schools be set up in the unions to give adult education. Women should be appointed as teachers.
 2. TV and radio should broadcast a list stating why people need education besides requirement to his job.
 3. The student fronts of the political parties can be used against illiteracy.
 4. Committees can be formed at thana level with scouts as members. University and college students can take part in literacy programme during their vacations.
 5. MPs should be permanent residents of their constituencies so that they can take part in literacy programme. Legislative provisions can be made in this respect.
 6. The government can organise the educated youths and launch literacy programme with them.
 7. Villages having highest literacy rate should be rewarded. District Education Officer (mass education) can be employed to look after the matter.
 8. The boys and girls employed in the households can be educated.
 9. Garment factory workers can be educated for 20 to 25 minutes in their work-sites.
 10. Prices of educational materials should be brought down.
 11. Political organisations can launch literacy programme, forgetting bickering.
- Prepared by Masud Hasan Khan