

University Education: Search for a Solution

by Imtiaz Ahmed Rumei

TODAY there is an alien youth culture, which toys with the idea of university, due to young people who are not primarily committed to the goals of education. In some measure the youth culture draws its values from the entertainment industry. Work becomes a bore, and there is often resentment against lecturing which does not seem to be specifically useful for examination purposes. This is the scenario Bryan Wilson described in his book, 'Youth Culture and University' published in England, 1959, which now appears to represent the Oxford of the East, Dhaka University.

What is more to the point is the fact that 'university education as we traditionally knew and valued it in our society, sought to introduce students to the richness of our cultural inheritance, to provide access to the cumulative aesthetic, literary, philosophical and scientific resources of mankind, and to stimulate intellectual discussion and critical assessment in a context in which young people have leisure and opportunity to savour all the best that our culture has to offer.' (Bryan Wilson)

Having completed academic life by graduating in sociology from the Oxford of the East, I often ask myself what I have achieved. I would like to share some of my own views on the education system which is prevailing within the University. In Dhaka University only a small proportion of the students use the library. You will find an average rate of passes in the SSC, HSC and Degree level. But hardly will you hear of passes at Honour's and Master's levels. Rather the authorities say it is the duty of

the teachers to pass the students, specially in the sociology department.

In social science and the arts faculties, except for the subject of Bangla, most of the books are found in English. Sometimes you may get some articles and a few books — but this is hardly worth mentioning. Yet Dhaka University library still is one of the richest libraries in the subcontinent.

We had a very glorious language Movement in 1952. Bangla Academy was estab-

lished after the historic Language Movement to provide higher education in Bangla. But having established the academy, it has become the weapon of the political parties. We still in 1994 don't have the necessary books needed for higher education.

Most of the students in Social Science and the Arts faculties pass Honour's and Master's without going through the books. They often collect notes from their elder brothers. The time has come to choose whether we want to

give certificates to the students, or knowledge. The political leaders are busy with the tug of power. Every political party is using university students for their purposes. It is hardly believable that our political leaders want proper education for our students. Many students died in the gun battle in Dhaka University. The political parties did not take responsibility, though some offspring of the political leaders study in neighbouring countries for their safety. They relax, sending their sons and

daughters abroad for higher into Bangla. But it is a very expensive process. Bangla Academy cannot finance the expense which is required to translate the books. The government does not have the intention to finance it. The private publishers are not interested in translating the required books because they are not as commercially profitable as, say, publishing the books of Humayun Ahmed, Imdadul Haque and Taslima Nasreen.

There are, however, some technical problems in learning English. We learn some grammar and stipulated translation. But in schools and colleges students simply memorise questions, essays and paragraphs which they reproduce in the examination. They are tested on how to memorise and reproduce, not how to speak, write, read English.

We are a very poor country. In diplomatic exchange there is no alternative to English education, but are busy creating chaos in our own educational institutions.

A major proportion of teachers are busy with panels — blue, pink, white. They often try to make a liaison with the political parties for their own benefit. They don't care about their students' education. Teachers' politics is a daily phenomenon.

To improve the education system we must introduce English medium in Dhaka University. No doubt a majority will oppose this system claiming that the mother language should be used for university education. But educating the students in their mother language is a time consuming matter. You will have to translate a large number of books



Courtesy — Unicef

School Phobia

by Col Mirza Shafi (Rtd)

FOR one child in every 200, school becomes too terrible to bear. Imagine a child who refuses to get out of bed in the morning, sometimes develops headaches, and nausea, at time goes by becomes panicky and then finally refuses to go to school. He locks himself in the bathroom, starts screaming, crying and even vomiting. His mother gets him into the car but when at the school, he clings to the door crying hysterically and would not let go.

This scene happens daily in front of the all schools. 'School phobia', as the psychologists call it, is not a common condition but when it happens it causes great anguish in children, parents and schools.

Strictly speaking, it is hardly a true fear of schools, rather some aspects of school, which most children would take in their normal stride, which causes panic in a particular child. These aspects could be:

- When class arrangements are changed suddenly, or without apartment reasons.

- When a new teacher is introduced during the term.

- When a teacher unwittingly threatens another student.

- If there are certain unhygienic situations (dirty) bathrooms, furnishing etc.

- Over crowding in the classes.

Again, there are certain complex family process at work that can make school phobia more akin to a separation anxiety problem. The children could then be taught techniques for controlling panic in real situations. The usual advice we at MIT offer is to allow the children to face the situations gradually with constant support from the school and family. If any child has a specific worry about the school, we take serious note of the case and solve the case mutually after discussions.

Whatever approach is decided upon, the problem must be tackled jointly by the school and the family. And once the child knows what to expect, has been helped to develop a few personal strategies for dealing with it, he is far less likely to panic in a new school environment or expect home situations from barring him attending school.

The writer is Adminstrator, MIT Banani.

Bhutan Steps up Drive to Increase Literacy Rate

by Jagan Nath

UNITED Nations aid agencies and Western countries appear to be loosening their purse-strings to promote the spread of education in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan.

Both in education and health facilities Bhutan is one of the most backward countries in the world.

The Bhutan government has signed an agreement with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other UN agencies for the renovation, upgrading and, in some cases, new construction of 29 primary schools and basic health units in the six eastern districts of the country.

According to official sources, the first phase of the project to strengthen infrastructure for primary education and basic health services is expected to cost about Nu. 112 million (\$3,630,731).

According to the agreement, seven entirely new structures are to be built, four reconstructed, one upgraded and three rehabilitated.

An UNDP spokesman reports that quite a number of UN-funded development activities have already been carried out in the eastern part of the kingdom in keeping with the royal government's policy of balanced regional development.

Officials of the external resources division of the Finance Ministry have been quoted as saying that implementation of the second phase of the project will depend on the performance of the current phase. It will also involve schools and health facilities.

At present New Delhi provides 100 scholarships every year to talented Bhutanese students for higher education and professional studies. In-service training is given to nominees of both the civil services and the private sector.

Bhutanese students also go to Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Japan, Singapore, the UK and the United States for higher studies.

While the need for teachers is still filled by recruiting non-Bhutanese, mostly from India, the proportion of local teachers in the education system has seen a dramatic increase. Trained Bhutanese teachers, most of them educated by the Indian pioneers, now make up more than 60 per cent of the teaching force.

Education officials are confident that the proportion would increase to 90 per cent by the year 2000. The remaining 10 per cent would be recruited from outside to enable an exchange of ideas and technology with Bhutanese teachers.

For instance, the Drugyal High School at Paro has been built with assistance of L1.05

— Depthnews Asia

Value-Added Lessons

by Yojana Sharma

THE Me Generation, Generation X... what next? A generation of nihilists?

Many parents and teachers in Asia do not want to wait to find out, and educating children about values is gaining ground in countries across the region.

South Korean children must learn 'national ethics' and moral education, in Singapore and Taiwan moral education is compulsory and now China is introducing more Confucian teaching in its schools to arrest the alarming decline in moral standards. In Hong Kong education in human values is spread throughout the curriculum.

There is recognition that throughout Asia the family unit, while not falling apart, is not as cohesive as it once was. Divorce is rising while external distractions such as television, electronic games, and comics are increasing.

Only children with strong, sound value systems will be able to resist the corrupting onslaught — or so the argument goes. Asian politicians also favour the teaching of values to safeguard 'Eastern' values against 'Western' values being increasingly imported via satellite television and other media.

But ironically, teaching values in schools separates values and ethics from religion and community, and breaks it down into its components such as loyalty, integrity, gratitude, endurance, self esteem and so on, all of which are universal rather than 'Eastern'.

For teachers, the point is not whether children prefer 'Western' to 'Eastern' values but whether they have any at all. Educators are more concerned that children develop basic human values common to all cultures. They believe some of what had contributed to perceived moral decline in the West are ominously present here, and increasing.

In the past there were not so many distractions. Basic human values were always at the bottom of every child's heart," says Sister Marie Therese of Hong Kong's Good Hope Primary schools. "Now they are drowned out."

In the last two years, all the teachers at Good Hope have attended workshops and undergone training on how to integrate teaching of human values in all parts of the curriculum.

They are taught the method developed by the India-based Satya Sai Foundation and adapted for international use by Lorraine Burrows, a Montessori teacher from Britain and Thai member of Parliament Art Ong Jumsai.

The method is now widely used throughout Thailand, heavily promoted by the government there. It is also being increasingly used in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Japan, Britain and Australia.

Although the Satya Sai Foundation's 'Education in Human Values' is itself adapted from the ancient Indian Bal Vikas (blossoming of the child)

— IPS

months and they in turn have introduced the method wholly or partially to some 20 schools.

Lesson plans devised by the Foundation include story-telling, artwork, singing, drama and other group activities to convey positive con-

cepts such as honesty, integrity, gratitude, perseverance, self confidence and so on.

Dorothy Chung of Hong Kong's Institute of Language in Education has developed teaching materials for Chinese medium schools, incorporating much of the Foundation's materials. She notes: 'Human values are universal. There is no discrimination between Chinese culture and modern culture which some would call Western culture.'

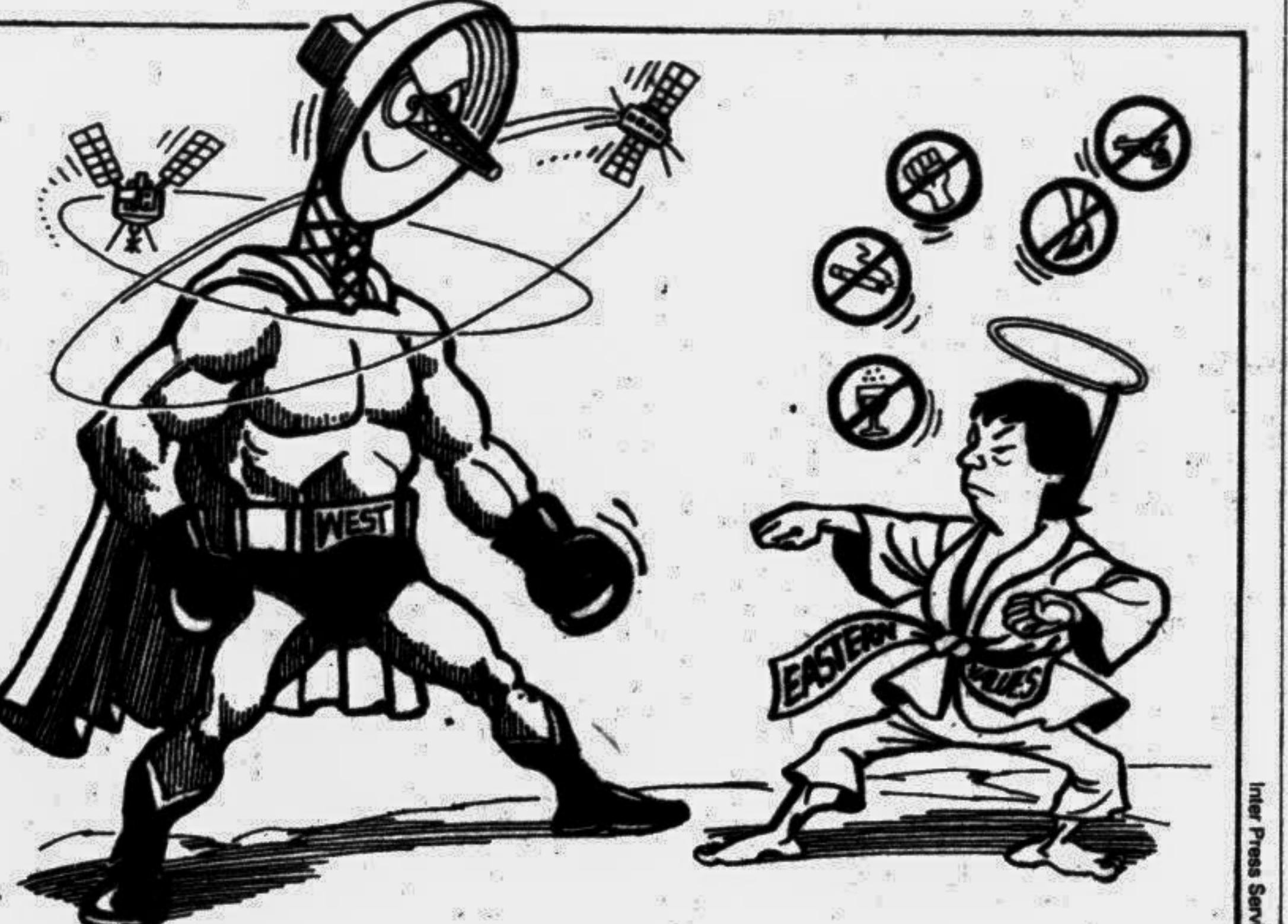
The important thing if children are not to be turned off altogether is how to teach values without sounding trite, cloying and insincere, says Daakshu Mansukhani of the

taught. Says Mansukhani: 'You can instill values by always emphasising the positive, whether teaching history, geography or science. We are not saying ignore the negative, but the strength of the positive must overcome the negative.'

Since Hong Kong began promoting education in human values as an integral part of the curriculum in 1992, charities and groups dealing with human rights, social help and even green issues report a growing interest by schools in their work in the past few years.

Often the very organisations

that Asian governments attack for promoting 'Western' ideas, these groups are now being invited to give talks on their work. And they report that



Inter Press Service



For a prosperous and just society, you have to think about this child.

Satya Sai Foundation in Hong Kong. Children do not want to be preached to about values by adults who they see flouting the same values all the time.

Basic human values must be 'instilled' so that they become part of the person, rather than

schools are not merely interested in hearing about their work but the philosophy behind their activities.

Says Robin Kilpatrick of Amnesty International in Hong Kong: 'I don't just talk about human rights but start with prejudice and intolerance — whether it be against kids who wear glasses or fat kids, and show how it has no logic.'

The demand from schools is such that the human rights organisation is now hiring a full-time education officer in Hong Kong, something it never needed before.

Will the teaching of values work? Teachers say at the very least, it will mean a more balanced education in many Asian nations where the only thing that counts is exam results.

A child may be brilliant academically, but is he able to handle his emotions? Is he able to care about society? Without these, academic success will waste away," says Mansukhani.

Many teachers also add that teaching values in schools will bring home to children how universal basic human values are. — IPS