

Education for Development

What Progress Since Independence?

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam



We are proceeding towards Independence Day. The nation has already observed 21st February this year with due solemnity to commemorate the blood of the martyrs in the Language Movement of 1952, which proved a turning point in the history of Bengal and Bangladesh. Nowhere in the world were such mass movement and sacrifices made to establish the right of the mother tongue. Immediately after partition of India in 1947, the Pakistani rulers proclaimed that Urdu shall be the state language of Pakistan. The Bengalees, their voices raised as one, cried 'No'. Our history is strewn with a number of successful movements, all leading to the establishment of a sovereign and independent Bangladesh, following the spirit of Ekushey.

There is no denying the fact that the inherent spirit of the state language movement was associated with the socio-economic aspirations of the people. This is evident from the fact that the movement did not end with the recognition of Bengali as a state language during Pakistani rule. Rather, it emboldened the people to exert their right to self-determination, as the Bengalee nation. Bengalees achieved this end and it found expression in the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, passed on 4th November, 1972. May we direct our attention to the following Articles of the Constitution, and consider where we stand to-day in 1995 on the eve of independence, which was proclaimed on the 26th day of March 1971?

Article 3. The state language of the Republic is Bengali.

Article 9. The unity and solidarity of the Bangalee nation, which, deriving its identity from its language and culture, attained sovereign and independent Bangladesh through a united and determined struggle in the war of independence, shall be the basis of Bangalee nationalism.

Article 17. The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of:

(a) establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be deter-

mined by law.

(b) relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs;

(c) removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law.

The question is how far have governments in power adhered to the Constitution and ensured its implementation? The record shows that in 1988, in Article 3 the word "Bangla" was inserted, substituting "Bengali". Article 9 was substituted by the Proclamations (Amdt.) Order, 1977, and provided for the promotion of local government institutions. What an irony of fate. The CMLA did not revive Articles 59 and 60 under Chapter III Local Government. It was revised in the Twelfth Amendment of the Constitution on 18th September, 1991. But, implementation is still awaited in 1995. Article 17 has remained intact, without any change to-date. But the governments over the years have nowhere near reached its implementation. Meanwhile, bureaucracy has expanded, and NGOs came into the picture from 1976, with the avowed objective to eradicate illiteracy.

To-day, we find a big edifice of administrative infrastructure, both under Government and Non-Government (voluntary) Organizations, liberally funded by foreign donors. There is no lack of zeal in observing International Literacy Day, National Education Week and attending International conferences. Now, we have representatives (Government as well as NGOs) at Copenhagen, participating in the World Social Summit for Development, sponsored by United Nations. We must wait to see what our national teams bring to us, the underdeveloped masses, from Copenhagen. But past experience does not make us optimistic.

Anyway, the end result after 24 years of independence is that Bangladesh is submerged in the deep darkness of illiteracy; whereas the countries around us are blazing the light of literacy, and developing rapidly. If we look at the newly developed countries of South East Asia, we realise how essential education is for development. The success of Sri Lanka in South Asia is also worth noticing. During the '80s South Korea, China, Thailand and Indonesia have

achieved economic growth 7 to 9 per cent on average. There has been remarkable progress in these countries in increasing per capita income, reducing infant mortality rate and increasing life expectancy. Behind the amazing socio-economic developments of those countries, the success in universal education played the major role. In the early 60s in Indonesia the rate of literacy was 39 per cent, which was raised to 72 per cent in 1985. During this period South Korea and Thailand added further success to their previous rate of literacy, raising it to 50 per cent plus. By 1985 South Korea had almost 100 per cent literacy. In Vietnam and China, primary education for all have already been ensured. In this region, every country gave special attention to female education.

After success in primary education, these countries have given attention to secondary education, based on technology and training. After building strong foundations at these two stages of education, they went for higher education. It is noticeable that the private sector plays a bigger

role than the state at the level of higher education. Every country spends 5 to 9 per cent of national income for the education sector, the lion's share of which is spent on primary education. In Indonesia and South Korea, 89 per cent and 84 per cent respectively of their Education Budget are spent on Basic Education. These types of expenditures and policy provision in the field of education have accelerated development, which, in turn, improved standards of living in those countries.

In spite of such success in education for development around us, Bangladeshi efforts and experience are anything but satisfactory. After 24 years of independence the over-all literacy rate is hovering round 25 per cent. The adult literacy rate is about 35 per cent. It is learnt that 43 per cent of the Education budget is spent on higher education whatever is provided for primary education is also not totally utilised. It is estimated that government expenditure per capita on primary students is only 2 per cent of that spent on students at higher levels. Moreover, the academic atmosphere at these higher levels is not at all congenial. More than one lakh students are studying in neighbouring countries and thousands more in western countries. Campus violence and session jam have disrupted the discipline, and thereby the development of the country.

We must accept the truth and take stock of the situation around us. Only then can we find solutions to manage the crisis honestly and squarely, and tread the path towards development to safeguard the golden tradition of Bengal. It is useless to blame one another for the failure. It is the combined responsibility of all concerned — Ministries and Directorates of the Government, NGOs, professional groups, politicians and individuals — to face the challenge and carry forward the movement for the eradication of illiteracy. May the Campaign for Popular Education, NGOs, and the Primary and Mass Education Division of the Government join hands to spread literacy throughout the 68 thousand villages of our country.

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World Summit for Social Development Education Empowers

EDUCATION is not only a right in today's world, it is an essential prerequisite to all development. And, although education alone cannot guarantee people economic and social well-being, it does empower each individual through its effects on their attitudes, aspirations, knowledge and skills. Simultaneously, through its impact on population dynamics and on the social, cultural, economic and political life, education helps improve the quality of life, creating or reinforcing the conditions needed to reduce the incidence of poverty.

Situation

Education has become far more accessible in all parts of the world, yet it is still far from being available for all. As statistics show:

- Illiteracy: There are currently 905 million illiterate adults worldwide. Despite all efforts, they may still number as many as 869.4 million by the end of the century. Seventy per cent of all illiterates live in only nine countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan. While there is an overall decline in the illiteracy rate, several countries have registered a rise in the number of adult illiterates because of population growth. Moreover, the illiteracy rate among the young is higher than among adults.
- Lack of schooling: 130 million eligible children do not go to school and their number may grow to 144 million by the turn of the century. Of those who do enrol, at least one-third do not finish school for a variety of socio-economic reasons.
- Gender gap: The situation is particularly acute for girls and women. Twenty nine per cent of all adult women are illiterate and 77.5 million of the out-of-school children are girls. The highest females literacy disparities are generally to be found in sub-Saharan Africa, in Southern Asia and in some Arab states.

Issues

No lasting progress towards sustainable development, political democratization, respect for human rights or social equity can be made if education is denied a central place in development efforts.

Education is one of the keys to improving quality of life, especially for women and girls, for it has been proven that educated women in all countries have smaller families. In Brazil, to cite just one example, illiterate women have 6.5 children on average, a figure that drops to 2.5 for women with a secondary education.

Not only do educated

women have fewer children, those children tend to live longer. Due to their enhanced knowledge about health care and nutrition, mothers are able to keep their families in better health. Statistically, evidence indicates that each additional year of a mother's schooling translates into a 5 to 10 per cent decline in child mortality.

In addition, the basic education of women enhances the pre-school care and development of their children and improves the efficacy of schooling by reducing absenteeism and dropouts.

Thus, through the universal spread of basic education, each new generation is born of better educated parents, thereby producing a cumulative improvement from one generation to the next.

Increasing productivity: It can also be argued that an educated population is a richer population, better equipped to face the future. Numerous studies verify the link between education and improved production. Keeping up with modern technology, which is now such a crucial part of the global economy, also requires skilled and educated workers.

Today countries like Korea and Malaysia, for example, are reaping the benefits of their previous heavy investments in raising the overall educational level of their workforce. Countries that have not followed suit, including former economic powers, in the North, are falling behind.

Improving the quality of life: Raising the general level of education helps enhance individuals' knowledge and powers of reasoning, as well as the ability to learn and adapt to changing conditions. Universal basic education encourages social mobility, which in turn tends to stimulate economic activity through competition and broad-based consumption. Rising expectations and social demand for education and other goods and services replace fatalistic acceptance of poverty and other negative conditions.

Approaches

In 1990 UNESCO launched the Education for All (EFA) movement in Jomtien, Thailand. Since then, a concerted worldwide effort has been made to get more children into better schools and to provide literacy training for those adults who cannot read and write.

Public spending per pupil in Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, jumped from \$274 in 1980 to \$434 a decade later. In the Arab States the educational investments increased from \$233 to \$333 per pupil.

However, many developing countries, hard hit by economic crises, find it difficult to maintain this momentum.

Rapid population growth and inadequate financial resources have compounded the problem. Taking this into account, UNESCO's programmes have concentrated on those areas where education has maximum impact:

- Encouraging access to quality education for girls and women.
- Improving the quality of education through teacher training programmes and curriculum development.
- Seeking out and promoting innovative projects that show how others provide education and literacy training for their communities or for marginalized groups, such as street children and cultural minorities.
- Reforming secondary, technical and higher education to make it more relevant in a world beset by environmental degradation, swelling populations, AIDS, drugs and unemployment.
- Working more closely with a broader range of partners, such as non-governmental organizations, professional bodies, the private sector and the media.

Future Priorities

Impeded by the inadequacy of budgets and systemic inflexibility, both quantitative and qualitative, educators and policy makers find themselves confronted with substantial obstacles.

Just a glance at contemporary problems highlights the enormity of this task. On the one hand, education is expected to respond, on a world scale, not only to social development demands, but also to guarantee the excellence of teaching standards and to ensure that no one "misses the boat".

Education is also expected to function as a vehicle for societal change and, at the same time, to cultivate intellectual curiosity, a capacity for adaptation and a taste for innovation.

Finally, in order to ensure the progress of modern societies, education must also encourage the blossoming of individuals deeply rooted in their culture. It must shape citizens. All these expectations constitute a formidable challenge.

As part of its contribution towards addressing this challenge, UNESCO has established an International Commission for Education in the twenty-first century. Headed by Jacques Delors (France), the Commission will present its recommendations at the end of 1995, thus providing an impetus for the quality of education which aims not only at a higher overall standard of living but also serves to improve the social and personal quality of life for ourselves and for future generations.

S. Asian illiterates accounts for 60 per cent of world's total

FOUR countries in Asia — India, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan — account for 590 million, or 60 per cent of the world's 948 million total illiterates.

Primary school dropout rates are high in many parts of the developing world as in Mexico (31 per cent), Togo (48 per cent) and Bangladesh (80 per cent), according to the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on the other hand, reports that 42 per cent of the population in south Asia and 11 per cent in east and southeast Asia live below the poverty line.

Studies have shown that poverty is often associated with low education standards and lack of relevant employment skills.

Science and technology education, in particular, can contribute both to economic and social development and to the formation of human personality, says a report by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Successful application of science and technology is nec-

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essary for the sustainable economic growth of a country, requiring a high level of input from well-trained scientific and technological experts, says UNESCO. "However, these experts cannot contribute their expertise without the backing of a scientifically literate workforce."

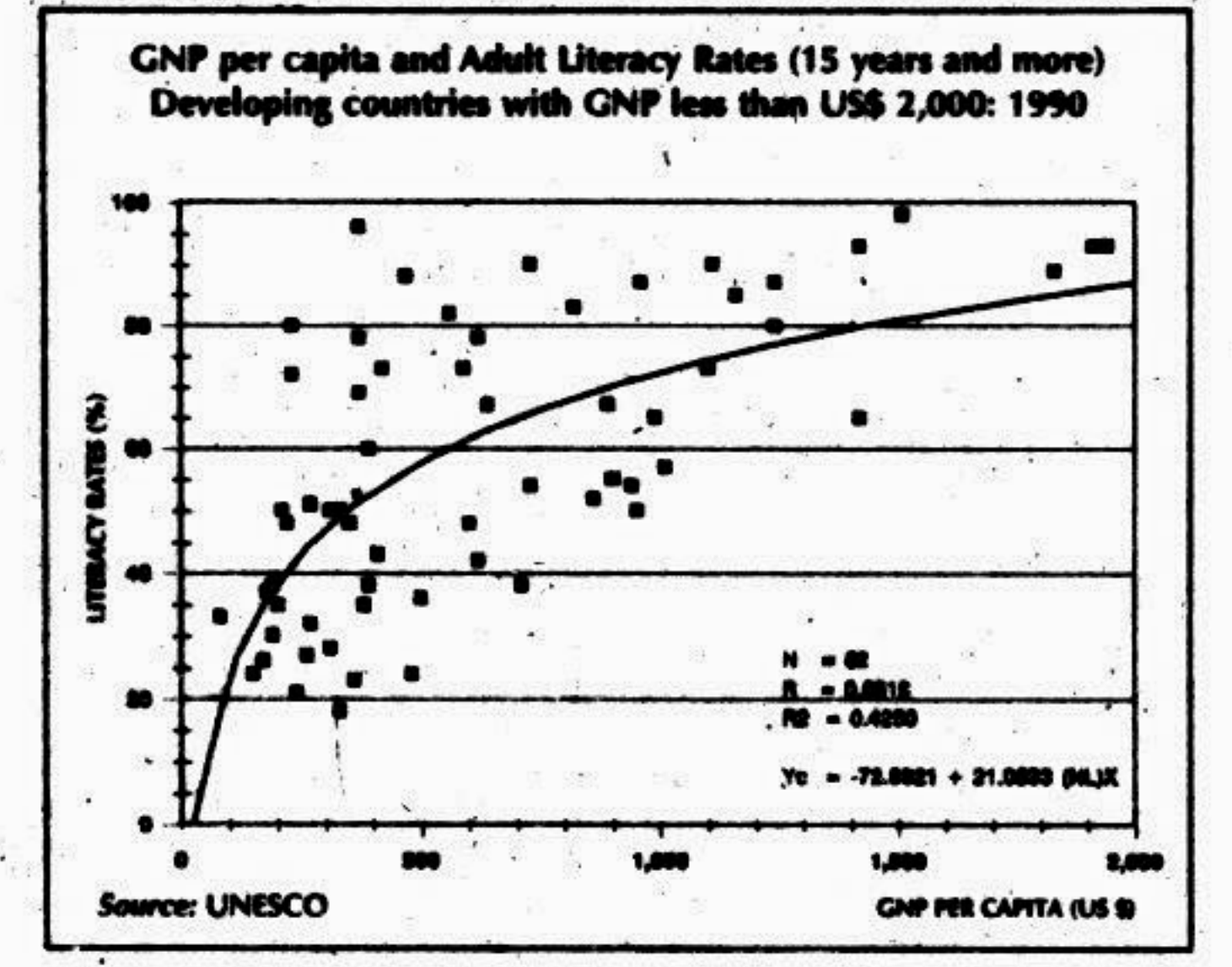
The Jomtien Conference in Thailand emphasized the necessity of having a literate population.

It concluded that without a scientifically-literate workforce, some countries in the Asia-Pacific region face a major restriction in their pursuit of sustainable development.

At an international conference in Paris, Project 2000+, some 200 participants from around the world exchanged knowledge and ideas and affirmed their commitment to

scientific and technological literacy for all.

This complements UNESCO's Asia-Pacific Programme of Education for All (APPEAL) launched in 1987 to eradicate illiteracy and universalize primary education by the



year 2000.

APPEAL recognized education as a means of development and as a fundamental human right. It likewise recognized the rich heritage of the civilization and cultures of the region which should be developed.

The UN-sponsored World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in observance of International Literacy Year (ILY) in 1990, enumerated three goals to be achieved by the year 2000. These are basic education for at least 80 per cent of the world's children; reduction of the adult literacy rate to half of its 1990 level; and equality of educational opportunity for girls and boys.

Some progress appears to have been achieved even before the Jomtien meeting. A UNESCO report reveals that impressive educational development has been achieved in the region over the past decade, giving reason for satisfaction.

In a number of Asian countries, growth rates in the primary school-age population continue to surpass those of student enrollments in recent years. — *Depthnews Asia*

Ensuring We Get Our Share of Extra-curricular Creativity

EDUCATION in our country has a very simple definition, it is the study of very concrete and useful disciplines. The more useful, the better. Hence the unimaginable competition to get into the engineering and medical colleges. Even some traditionally beloved subjects of the world's learned, such as Physics and Mathematics, are looked down upon. They are called subjects of the "general line". Hence BUET students think they are superior to Dhaka University students. And if you would like to study a liberal arts subject like Bangla-

everyone performed in some form. Everyone had some talent. A certain auntie knew how to sing, someone else danced, and some doctor uncle or another would always recite poetry. In fact, I knew so many doctors who loved to either write poetry or recite it that for a long time I believed medicine and poetry to be intimately linked.

Many Bangladeshi university professors, doctors, office workers, and businessmen are actually nocturnal actors, singers, and writers. The reverse is true also. Most prominent TV and stage actors,

My first reaction was to lament this huge neglect in our education system. But when I look around me, I still see many Bangladeshi children who take voice lessons at home or Chhayaton, dance lessons, and art lessons. There are plenty of institutions and private instructors who're more than willing to impart the magic of the arts to any interested party. Therefore, perhaps it is not the responsibility of the schools to take care of a child's creative growth. Perhaps I must address Bangladeshi parents in this article.

English Teaching in Our English Medium Schools

HOWEVER much we promote Bengali, English is the crying need of the hour. I don't oppose the idea of learning Bengali. Bengali is our mother tongue and we must cherish it beyond any question. In no way can we ignore it. But there is no denying the fact that we must also learn English to benefit ourselves and to benefit the nation. Unfortunately the standard of English has fallen to a deplorable level.

The first and foremost improvement that should be made immediately is the improvement of the teaching process. The teaching process in English medium schools remained, mostly, as traditional as the general schools for our country, i.e. making their students gorge some selected questions and emitting them back in the exam scripts to score high marks. I personally know of schools where the school authorities give their teachers copies of some selected questions with answers ready to be taught in the

classes. Students memorise those materials often without going through the text. The more one reproduces exactly the teacher's sample, the more marks one gets, and parents in general are satisfied with the high score thus achieved.

But high scores do not necessarily mean a high standard of learning. Learning is quite a different thing. Parents have yet to understand this. I have found most parents to be more concerned with marks in the exam than the enrichment of idea and originality development of their children. I have found parents bargaining with teachers even over half a mark. In the face of this, real learning, which is a continuing process and not an immediate result, is difficult.

The next improvement that can be made, in English medium schools is some modification in the curriculum. There is no central committee or board to guide the curriculum of English medium schools. There is no central

policy. In the name of high standards, many schools prescribed books for higher classes in the lower classes, not understanding that under pressure, damages a child's natural aptitude for learning. But among the general public, unfortunately, it is believed that the more pressure is applied to students, the better is the school. So on this point also, awareness of the general public is important for any change.

As there is no research work regarding the curriculum, the curriculum in these said schools mostly remain behind the times. Certain text books commonly used were published long ago for teaching through the "look and say method" with gradual phonic treatment. They are no more in use in the countries where they originated. These books and their teaching process are no more found productive. English is a dynamic subject. So we must include the latest books to keep pace with the

fast moving trends and to raise the level to international standards.

To develop proficiency in a language three things are necessary (1) Stock of word or vocabulary (2) Power of comprehension and (3) Skill and capacity of expression.

To increase vocabulary and develop power of comprehension, an extensive reading habit is necessary, and the capacity of expression is the spontaneous out flow of absorbed knowledge and feeling, which can be shaped through regular free-writing practice.

Another change that can be brought about is in the system of obsessive testing. Many high-rated schools make their students achieve results, in my experience through memorised material aided by expensive private coaching under a steam roller of series of class tests. It is worth mentioning that this tendency is not only exclusive to high-rated English-medium schools but also to many high-rated Ben-

gali-medium schools. But do these good results contribute anything to qualitative and originality development of the students which we need to day to build our nation? The system of taking tests as preparation for public exams should be modified. We must test a child not to pressurise him but to test how much a teacher can give to a child.

It is true that English medium schools in Bangladesh have many obstacles in their way. The greatest of them is getting a teacher with adequate knowledge of English and teaching capacity. The mushroom-growth of English medium schools without any available control has also deteriorated the standard of English. So there should be a check to it. I repeat again that there should be a change in our traditional system of teaching, though it is a difficult job to break a tradition especially in a country like ours.

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English Literature, or Philosophy, then God help you. If you are a woman, then people will assume you're just passing time till you get married, and if you are a man, your parents will give up on you and transfer all their hopes to your heavily bespectacled younger brother.

"Arts or Science?" is the first question a Bangladeshi student has to face. If he or she is any good in the sciences, then the answer is simple. Science, of course. Then, after intermediates, the next question, "Engineering, architecture, or medicine?" Most try for all three with equal zeal. I have yet to meet a Bangladeshi who is in the least bit imaginative when choosing a profession.

What is amazing, however, is that Bangalis are some of the most cultured and accomplished people in the world, regardless of their profession. I remember when my parents used to organise annual functions among their friends, ev-

singers, artists, and other types of artistes actually hold another strait-laced day-time job. To interject a personal opinion, it is the pursuit of these arts that form the backbone of our society — the very essence of a Bangladeshi life. The happiest and most optimistic Bangladeshis are those who are creatively occupied.

But our schools do not offer many extra-curricular activities, nor do they encourage them. Some Bangla Medium schools with large playgrounds accommodate a good sports programme, but such American and European concepts as the Student Newsletter, the Yearbook Committee, and music lessons are unheard of. English Medium schools, while offering a high standard of education in the approved disciplines, are even more lacking in the extracurricular sector. They act more as tutorials than schools set out to turn out well rounded individuals.

What I need to say is this: Yes, Math and the sciences are valuable subjects. Yes, it is important to earn a good living, and if studying engineering or medicine will guarantee this, then that is well and good. But it is just as essential to expose a child to the arts — to voice lessons, drama lessons, dance classes, and painting instructions. Many of our happiest moments, in childhood and in later years, are those spent in the exploration of our creative selves. They make life, especially a Bangladeshi life, just that much more worth living. More importantly, they impart a child the imagination to make valuable choices in later life. Insight into his or her own unique talents, and tremendous self confidence. So if you think your child has too many free hours, or looks a little too bored, don't engage another private math tutor. Put him in Chhayaton or take her to the Jhappti art school.