

TEENS and TWENTIES

The Intellectual Snob

by Fyyaz Shahnoor

In my long years of existence I have come across a good number of person who are commonly referred to as intellectual snobs.

In native dialect we know them as "Aetls", people who know absolutely everything about anything. Many a time have I had to patiently endure the tedious arguments and revelations of these unique human characters.

Many a time have I had to control the urge to punch him in his nose while he was giving a lecture on the nationalistic tendencies of immature jelly-fishes. However over the years careful observation has convinced me that these unassuming, standoffish creatures fall into three main categories. We shall call them Type 1, Type 2 and Type 3. Let us proceed.

Type 1 snobs are quite harmless and have infinitesimal impact on our society. "Apathy" is their motto and they lie right on the border between sanity and madness. They are too busy pondering over the meaning of life than to be interested in other trivial matters that lesser humans (like us) are engaged in. These types of intellectual snobs are usually bookaholics. They are mainly found in and around the public libraries carrying a stack of books.

A surprising fact about these people are that unlike Type 2 and Type 3 aetls these sad creatures actually read the books. Although Type 1 aetls sometimes do carry themselves about with an air of aloof superiority they are seldom dominating to non-intellectuals. Type 1 snobs try to keep interactions between them and the general public at a minimum. But sometimes when provoked they react by saying,

"I am better than thee" attitude. If this attitude is not restrained it may develop into a "I'm better than myself" complex and the individual becomes totally disheartened and disoriented.

In this stage he ceases to be a Type 2 snob and should immediately be put into psychotherapy. The Type 2 intellectual snobs seldom read books to expand their knowledge because it is their belief that they already know too much. However, once in a while he makes vague attempts at writing books of poetry that no publisher in his right sense of mind would publish. The Type 2 snob then criticises all publishers of moral decay just to save face.

However we actually need the Type 2 snobs. After all, somebody has to recite incoherent poetry while eating "Panta Bhat" on Pahela Baishak, and somebody has to produce high thought drama serials on the television. And somebody has to write pieces about contemporary literature in the dailies. However if by some incomprehensible act of providence the Type 2 snob can refrain from all these he has a very good chance to mature into the Type 3 snobs.

Which brings us finally to the Type 3 snobs who are regional celebrities among Type 2 snobs. They are noted throughout the country as distinguished intellectuals and brilliant academicians but who are, non-the-less, intellectual snobs. These Type of persons are usually bachelors because they despise the moral bondage that spouses may bring upon them.

They are frequently seen on the grounds of Bangla Academy and in talk shows



Who is superior?

— Photo A K M Mohsin

ing. "Constant oval rotation of the celestial bodies prohibits my verbalising and other such gibberish. All in all the Type 1 intellectual snob is tolerable and keep mainly to themselves.

Unfortunately the same cannot be said about the Type 2 intellectual snobs. This type is very dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. We may define him as a person who is "educated beyond his intelligence". The average Type 2 snob is an untalented soul who starts his career as a babbling brook of big words but quickly develops into a cascading river of meaningless mouthings.

He is the type of person that carries books like "Freudian interpretation of Siberian Literature" — written in Cantonese. Usually he feels obliged to quote from others because he has no thoughts of his own. To advertise his own verbosity he uses words that are seldom understood, which he himself accidentally found out in the dictionary.

The Type 2 snobs suffer from a severe case of superiority complex and a "I'm bet-

ter than thee" attitude. If this attitude is not restrained it may develop into a "I'm better than myself" complex and the individual becomes totally disheartened and disoriented.

He becomes very religious and abandons all past beliefs in his crusade of glorifying the Lord. He gets a honest job so that he can make an honest living or he converts himself into a type 1 aetl thus relieving himself of all worldly responsibilities.

There is no ground for viewing an intellectual snob as a very wise person just because he's memorised a few words and a few names. On the contrary the common snob (Type 2) is a person with below average intellect, he has a tightly closed mind attached indecently to a wide open mouth.

But that's nothing to worry about, his bark is worse than his bite.

For A Better Tomorrow

by Rowshan B Rahman

Of all the things that nature brings
Happiness and thoughts of pleasant things
Of all the things that nature has
That brings us to the future from the past
Love and happiness as it seems
Turn our life all into dreams
The special day which is on our way
In one rhyme
Give it love and tender care
All in one time
So let this day begin with joy
And forever may it last
With special things
That nature brings
To forget
All the past.

The Existing Education System

We don't Need No Thought Control

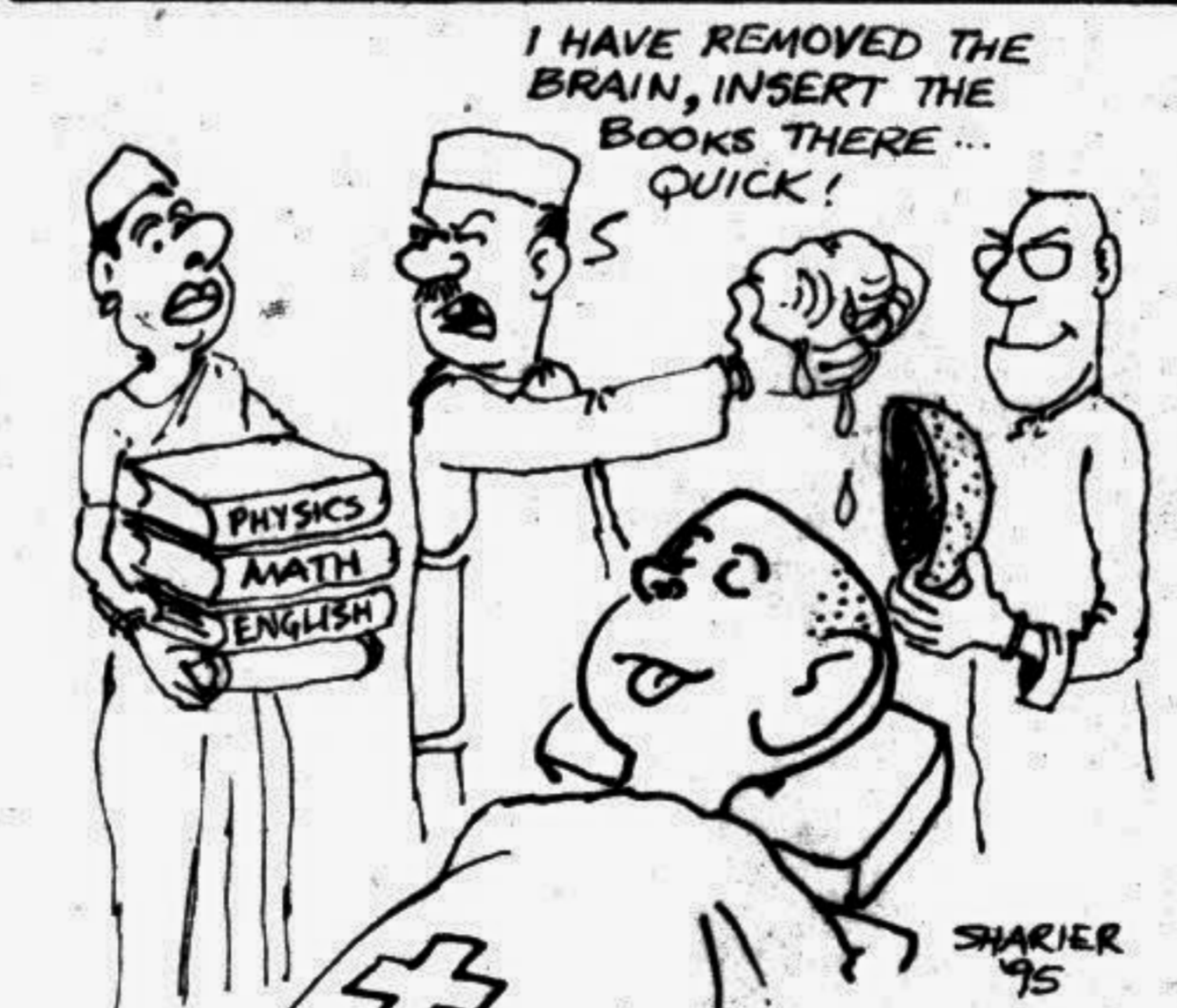
by Joy Alamgir

THE education system currently prevailing under the boards of education in Bangladesh is almost obsolete. It hampers the sole aim of education, to instigate the mind to be creative, to be innovative. So, unless there's a rapid and radical change in the education system, the future of building minds is dubious. In our education system, there is a patent neglect of English. The English text that's provided by the text book board is sharply inadequate. For example, the English text books of grades 1 and 2 just emphasise on the alphabet and several spellings. A 6 or 7-year-old student can easily digest more. And if the base is not made strong, they cannot prosper in English later.

English should be an emphasised cause. It's an international language. So the board can start by restructuring the whole English learning sequence. Even in the higher classes the standard of English is extremely low. Sentence construction is limited to a few structures and therefore hampering the freedom prevailing in the English language. Same goes with the higher grades. I have never seen a standard English text let alone a standard syllabus.

But even more prominent is the inadequacy present in the science-related subjects. The books even at the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) level are grossly backdated. It looks like the authorities of the board are retrospective.

Take for instance the Biology book of the SSC. Things which would serve no purpose in life are being taught. Why would anyone study the classification of trees or plants? What purpose would be served by merely memorizing names and properties which will certainly slip into the unconscious mind? Fine, viruses and bacteria are in the syllabus — but to what extent? What benefit would it serve us by learning which trees have parallel lines on its leaves and



which don't?

Such chapters covering these obsolete stuff are the important ones! What is the board trying to do — destroy the mind or make memorizing masters? The chapters that really need to be stressed upon (such as the chapters covering nervous systems, endocrine systems) are left quite deficient in material. More patent is the inadequacy in Chemistry and Physics at the SSC level. First of all — they combined two subjects, i.e. Physics and Chemistry, and made it only one paper. Great?? Okay we would have supported it if the study matter were even near to being sufficient. But it's not. The lessons are structured like "Let's do it ourselves" stuff. Did they ever find out that nobody really does the "do it" stuff? Alright — let's assume they can be pardoned for that. Come to the really theoretical stuff. Can you imagine that under the board the only thing 9th and 10th graders know about vectors is that "these have a magnitude and direction? Nothing else. Not even the knowledge of adding vectors, let alone multiplying them. Whereas we see that in non-board systems students of the same grades are toying freely with vectors. This is just

one example. Alright fine — so they might come with an excuse 'who cares about Physics?' So come to Chemistry.

A teacher of a college said that properties of Oxygen and Hydrogen were supposed to be taught thoroughly in the 9th and 10th grade. And other gases will be stressed at the HSC level. Fine and okay. But no, they were smarter, the two gases are not taught thoroughly now. They could have added those in the HSC syllabus. But they were far wiser than we thought. "Nah — who needs Oxygen and Hydrogen — they're in the air abundantly right?"

— Could this be their train of thought? (Trains are getting derailed very frequently these days.) Alright — forget chemistry.

Come to mathematics. Though not as deficient as the other subjects, it still has room for some improvement. Like instead of teaching kids' stuff geometry at grades 7 or 8 they can make the standard a little higher so that 9th and 10th graders can become a little more adept at handling tougher problems. They can also start teaching solid geometry at least in the 9th grade or 10th grade. It's in the book but it's not be-

ing taught. And it's certainly not that hard. They can also start a little calculus. They can start trigonometry from the eighth grade even.

Now, there's a big flaw in the system. Is a teenager ready to decide what he'll study in his life before even knowing what the subjects are like? The answer's obvious. But somehow the people here don't seem to understand that. That's why they have this ridiculous system which divides the students into two broad groups, i.e. Science and Arts.

This system hampers the child to study the subjects he has a knack for and give up subjects that just don't attract him. But they were wiser this time also. Students of 'science' cannot study subjects present in the 'Arts' group and vice versa. Unfortunately, no one is giving them time or opportunity to try out the subjects and then choose. Then again their is a whole list of compulsory subjects and only one optional subject.

They don't understand that not all students like or are good at all subjects. Some student might have a knack for Bangla or English, some for maths or science, some for economics and stuff and some for mixed stuff.

No, you can't do that. Cause that's the rule of the board. Instead of letting the child bathe and flourish in the subjects that interest him they churn out tailored minds, all having the same dimensions. This scenario reminds us of the verse, "We don't need no Education. We don't need no thought control. Lately, it is heard that at least the board of education is toying with the idea of reforming their system.

Let's hope this initiative does not stay as an idea only. Let's also hope that they will see to the benefits of the young minds and change their awkward system and start making minds not tailored, prosaic, mechanical, unimaginative instruments.

Why should I know?

by A Zaki Choudhury

In the past few weeks, a few articles have appeared in these pages concerning the widespread ignorance about our country and its history among school students (especially English medium ones). But then again, why are these revelations so stunning? It's not as if we don't have anything better to do than learn about our own history?

It's kind of ironic when I say 'our country', isn't it? It makes you wonder how many of the people in question regard Bangladesh as 'their country.' After studying for the better part of their lives in schools modelled closely after western institutions, their views of the world tend to show an increasing western influence. And when the western media is controlled by the same people who tagged Bangladesh a 'basket case', our country isn't our country anymore, it's just another (poverty-stricken) spot on the map.

Forgive me for being stereotypical, but it is true that this kind of ignorance is commonplace among English medium school students. There are many young people who are eager to learn about our country, but when they are tagged nerds or 'Aetls', it isn't very encouraging.

Forgive the sarcasm here, but, the question is, why should I know about Bangladesh? After all, listening to Guns 'n' Roses or watching Pamela Anderson is much more appealing. And with BTV broadcasting ridiculous programmes, do these kids have any choice (sorry, I am being sarcastic again)? Say, does the name BTV sound familiar? Since ignorance seems to be the popular trend, it makes me wonder how many of you still remember that ancient institution.

The printed word is always there, but who's got the time? Sheldon, Forsyth, Asimov are the popular names and the occasional foray towards Humayun Ahmed won't do much good. These books are more in the way of light entertainment, not food for thought. But what can I say, I guess it all comes down to popular trends. And ignorance, is pretty hip in America, too. So if it's 'in' over there, it's 'in' here well. Drawn by the hype of the western media, our youth would much rather be aliens over there than 'natives' back here.

But I can't go on because Bryan Adams has just come on. And don't ask me about 'Swadhinata Dibash': it was probably sometime last week.

What to Speak Bangla, English or Benglish?

by Labiba S Ali

কতকাল IT WAS VERY VERY সীট. I WAS টিকি মাটিয়া WITH THIS CHICK!



IT'S been noticed for the past few years the great influence of the English language on the daily lives of our fellow Bengalis. Probably the most effected are the students of the English medium schools in Dhaka. Walking down the corridor of one of these schools, one can hear the classmates speaking to each other, "since khulke's holiday, why don't, you come over to my place around nota in the morning" or, "Aajke ato bhirsti hoeche that all the roads have flooded."

The above are a few ways the new generation of Bengalis are communicating with each other. Why is this happening? Is this the result of watching Star Plus? Or is this a new trend picked up from our neighbouring country, India, where Hindi is spoken widely? Is this bad or good for our children?

As more satellites are being launched and communication throughout the world is improving, the distance barrier between mankind is lifting. The breaking down of this barrier is bringing people of different nationality, religion, race, and beliefs together.

What is happening in Burundi, Rwanda, and Bosnia are being retelecast immediately to the homes of millions around the world. Be it the stock exchange crisis in Mexico or the age long feud between the Palestinians and Israelis, every major event is being seen or observed by many around the world either by watching television or by listening to the radio.

All this and more, as I said before, is bringing people together as they become aware of each others presence. As we move into the 21st century, we can detect the formation of a world culture, and because of this world culture, our future generations are starting to adapt to the English language.

Being the universal language of the world, it is convenient to adopt to English and much easier to learn as English is a comparatively easy language. For the benefit of our nation and its people we should encourage our future generations to speak English rather than to discourage it. In the meantime we should not neglect our beautiful mother language, Bengali, for which our forefathers have shed their blood, but instead learn to speak both languages properly and fluently. Learning to speak two languages makes it more proficient and creative in the use of your own language.

When saying to speak both languages properly and fluently we should be careful not to mix both languages together in one sentence. When speaking Bengali, the whole sentence should be in Bengali rather than a few words of English and Bengali here and there. In this way we will be able to keep the purity of our language, a language which has developed over centuries of use to become the appropriate one, skillful enough to express our rich culture.

SAY 'NO' TO CHILD LABOUR

by Tadib Muqtada

HUNDREDS of children clamber over a huge mound of stinking garbage, each with a sack in one hand and a metal stick in the other, dodging around dump trucks and fighting over the latest cascade of rubbish to see what treasures it might offer.

This was the smoky Mountain on the outskirts of Manila in the Philippines, being shown on the television. It was visually disturbing.

To my mind there is no doubt that child labour should be abolished. In order to justify such an opinion it is of course necessary to understand what is child labour; why do children have to work; what are the various places of work that children are engaged in, and what kind of societies do these children belong to.

In any place or society most children work. Usually after the age of six or seven, little girls are seen to help their mother with some household work, or little boys help their father clean the garden. In many countries especially in the rural areas and villages, children also help parents with farm work at early ages, or sometimes in the small shops and businesses. This often helps prepare the children with traditional or family skills so that they can themselves carry on their family occupation.

What I mean by 'child labour' is, however quite different from that above. When I argue that child labour should be abolished, it refers to exploitation of children in some form or the other. It means that children are deprived of the basic things that they should be entitled to — for example, education, having some skills, health and nutrition, protection and healthy childhood environment.

In many countries, especially the poor countries, there are hundreds of thousands of children who do not

receive these basic rights of childhood, and are forced to work. Why do children have to work? Where do they work?

The most obvious reason seems to be that children who come from poor background have to work and earn something extra for the survival of the family. There are millions of families who are poor, particularly in the rural areas of Africa, Asia and Latin America. There, the children have to share in the work of the family so that it can barely survive. The problem is that very often the children have to drop out from school in order to do so. That is when child labour becomes unacceptable.

More appalling is the child labour in the urban areas. In cities, in factories, where child labour is exchanged for very low wages. Where there are no family businesses, poor families send their children to factories and quarries, to construction sites, to brick fields and often simply to street vending to sell lottery tickets, bananas or cigarettes. While families need the small incomes that the children make at the end of the day, it is visibly shocking to see them work all day in horrible conditions.

I have tired to distinguish between children working around a healthy family environment, and child labour which is exploitative, and is an insult to human dignity. It is this latter which I argue should be banished. The reasons are very simple. First of all, as I have already mentioned, child labour is used for exploitation. They are cheap labour, and those firms or employers who engage them do so with a profit motive, without considering their welfare. Second, child labour is wastage of human

resources since the children can not develop physically and intellectually. Although the families of the children stand to gain from their income, it is a cost to the society as a whole.

Third, child labour is frequently associated with bad conditions and place of work. They work for lower wages, they labour for longer than usual, they are often engaged in hazardous work like mining, 'bidi' (a kind of cigarette) factories. Fourth, child labour brings a bad reputation for a society or country, especially when they are found begging, stealing, vending on the streets or working in brothels. It is also morally unjustified.

I can imagine many people saying that a poor country cannot afford a decent living for all its people, and hence their children must unfortunately, share in the struggle for survival. It is true that poverty of many countries cannot be eradicated overnight. It requires a lot of time and proper policies. Many families cannot afford the costs of education of their children, nor can the governments provide free education for all. But we also know that even in the poorer countries there are rich and influential people who should be taxed or told to contribute to the education purpose of poorer children.

There is also quite a difference between poverty, and child labour exploitation. The worst forms must be identified, and immediate steps must be taken by the government to stop them.

I think that, although it is difficult to abolish child labour in many countries because of poverty, these countries could at least start making the first steps in that direction. For instance I have said, it should be possible to

identify the worst forms of child labour, which should be abolished immediately. The government should make laws to achieve this. They should also provide strict rules to those who employ child labour, to look after welfare, their health and their training and education.

There should be a campaign by the educated people of the country to declare that it is a disgrace to the country to use child labour. The government should expand free education and schooling, and training places, and provide the children a scope to get a better job, and get away from unhealthy jobs. The international communities such as the rich donor countries, the UN organizations, the NGO's, should strongly help these poor countries eradicate child labour.

The campaigns against child labour has started in many places. Many organizations are trying to help the children, who are trapped in odd jobs, to get better education, health and training. Some governments have started prohibiting use of child labour in some industries. The rich countries have threatened that they will not import garments, rugs, toys, or any other items which are produced with child labour in the developing countries. Companies like Adidas and Reebok are already telling their producers not to use child labour. In the rich countries also there are many places where child labour is used. They should set an example, for other countries to follow, by removing child labour.

Child labour is an insult to human dignity anywhere. If the children indeed represent the future of a nation, they must deserve to be treated with care and dignity. Child labour must be abolished. It may require a long and hard battle to do so, but the fight against it must be relentless. Say 'no' to child labour.