

# The Nudge in the Ribs: University sans Halls?

**W**RITING about the present plight of the University of Dhaka, Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui asserted that "the University has been slowly but steadily sinking as an institution soon after the independence of '47, but it took some years before the symptoms of decay became perceptible. The clearest manifestation of the process was the decline of the Halls of Residence." (The Daily Star, hereinafter DS, September 24, 1996, P.4). Siddiqui, however, finds potentials to be explored through "hard thinking and tough action." He didn't specify what he meant by hard thinking and tough action. This article, however, will venture to spell out some nuts and bolts of hall education.

It strikes me as a seminal note which should demand consideration by not only the University authorities, but also the Government, political parties, teachers, students, the guardians, parents, relatives and 'philanthropists' footling the bills of their wards in the 'Halls of Residence.' Time was, when these halls gave life to the University. What an irony of fate, now these halls have become dens of terrorists taking away lives of students in occasional gunfighting. We must therefore think alternative ways of running the University. I, for one, would argue that it is time to think of University without halls.

In its inception, the University of Dhaka (then spelled Dacca) began with three Halls of Residence — Dacca Hall, Jagannath Hall, Salimullah Muslim Hall. In accordance with the recommendation of the Calcutta University Commission, "the Dacca University students were resident in or attached to one of the Halls.... The students other than post-graduate students were allowed to live with their relations or specially approved guardians." M.A. Rahim, The History of the University of Dacca, 1981, P.32).

**A NEW MODEL FOR A UNIVERSITY** : Unlike Calcutta University with which the people of Bengal were acquainted and other Universities in India, the University of Dacca was designed on a new model with the distinctive characteristics of a teaching-cum-residential university, with the provision of tutorial system, and three years Honours course. The then chancellor of the University, Lord of Lytton observed, "In my opinion this University is Dacca's greatest possession and will do more than anything else to increase and spread the fame of Dacca beyond the limits of Bengal or even of India itself." (Rahim, op cit, p. 56). The first VC P. Haring spoke in appreciation of the tutorial system — stressing that much time of the teachers are given to tutorial teaching — the teaching destined specially to develop the individual capacity of the students." (Rahim, ibid). Thus, (a) teaching-cum-residential campus; (b) tutorial system, and (c) three-year Honours course were the three distinguishing marks of Dacca University.

As already indicated, the students were required to be either resident or attached to any of the three Halls. The provost, with the assistance of the 'House Tutors' and Assistant House Tutors supervised the affairs of the Hall and looked after the general well-being of the students. The Provost organised the tutorial teaching of the BA or B.Sc Pass students in co-operation with the Head of the Departments (now called Chairman). The Department concerned organised the tutorial teaching of its Honours students. The Hall provided facilities for literary and socio-cultural life and religious

teaching to its students. (Rahim, P.56).

One of the convocation speakers, Sir Akbar Hydari observed that the Dacca University for the first time among the modern Universities in India realised "students must live near their teachers, for this reason you became a residential University. In the next place, students must have access to their teachers; for this reason Dacca has established the tutorial system. In the third place, learning must be both imparted and enhanced; for this reason you founded a strong tradition of research and of original work. Finally, the University must be a focus of intellectual activity; for this reason you devoted assiduous care and attention to the creation and maintenance of a magnificent library." (Quoted in Rahim P.76).

This address identifies for us the main purposes of Dacca University — at least in terms of the original objectives: (a) residential university enabling students to live near their teachers, (b) teaching by tutorial system so that students have additional opportunities of interacting intellectually with their teachers besides the classroom-situation of lecturing and note taking. If not all, most teachers do research and publish their Ph.D/M Phil theses and other works later. Original works everywhere must be rare. So the question : if these activities are engaged in, how is it that University students or a large number of them residing in Halls have turned 'terrorists'? The 'tutorial' system is there and yet there has been no or little salutary effect on the students in terms of values to be cultivated.

## What the Halls Have Been :

Halls have now become forts to be occupied by one political party supporters or the other. These "forts" are to be occupied by arms, held by arms, and run by armed students — without any reference to Hall authorities. These halls can now be compared to 'Chars' which arise ... to be in the big rivers. Chars are occupied by whosoever get there first at the later entrants are either opposed by arms or subdued into submission. A number of people get killed in the fray, and many others injured or maimed. Those who survive the attacks or counter attacks — survive only to be party cadres. This situation is so frequently reported in the newspaper that it is hardly necessary to substantiate the point by fresh statistics.

Nonetheless, consider some recent happenings with the change in the national government, a series of such "Char-Dakhal" type of "Hall Dakhal". The political culture of the University of Dhaka has been for the student front organisations of major political parties — AL or BNP to show their strength or support by occupying the Halls of Residence — as if the ruling party would not feel comfortable without the public demonstration of student support. When BNP was in power (1990-95) its student front JCD occupied most halls. Now that BNP lost to AL, AL's student front BCL must recapture those halls. And it did happen. On August 20, 1996, the two conflicting sides — BCL and JCD — held a 6-hour long gunfight forcing the University to close down for 3 days (DS 22.8.96). It led to such comments by a former DUCSU leader: "The AL when it was out of power had wanted a terrorism free campus. But now in power, they have let loose a reign of terror on the DU campus forcibly ousting the students and capturing residential Halls" (reported in DS 25.8.96).

As for the Muslim students, the Commission recommended for a Muslim Hall. "It will offer to the Muslim students a full corporate life or will enable the sons of Muslim parents to secure education under those religious influence to which they attach so much importance."

A Review of values : The reason for these elaborate descriptions of a residential university is that it served effectively well the teachers and students

To think of education in terms of Degrees and money is devoid of any social obligation and unrelated to any higher duty. Thus the purpose of education is related to the structure of education and a philosophy guiding it. In this vein, the halls of residence for students must be judged in terms of contribution made to making a person useful to family, country, and humanity, writes Muhammad Anisuzzaman.

of Dhaka University decades ago (if Prof Siddiqui is correct). Things started going in undesirable directions steadily sinking and taking symptoms of decay.

If a guardian analyses the purposes of the University of Dacca — now in 1996, some 75 years later — he/she might discover that the purposes have become counterproductive. On the face of it, all three purposes are still observed: teachers and students reside on campus within walking distance — meeting more than once everyday within the class and outside, greeting and exchanging thoughts. Access to teachers is available through "tutorials" so that the students have additional opportunities of interacting intellectually with their teachers besides the classroom-situation of lecturing and note taking. If not all, most teachers do research and publish their Ph.D/M Phil theses and other works later. Original works everywhere must be rare. So the question : if these activities are engaged in, how is it that University students or a large number of them residing in Halls have turned 'terrorists'? The 'tutorial' system is there and yet there has been no or little salutary effect on the students in terms of values to be cultivated.

Another lamentable but related phenomenon is the stand of teachers on such occasions and ostensibly to stay clear by expressing 'concerns' over 'outsiders' in different halls. It's a fact that there are 'outsiders' but these outsiders, like the students and their teachers, are either BCL or JCD outsiders. The police is aware of it, at times arrests a few such outsiders and lets them go conveniently. Thus the role of the police leave much to be desired.

There is yet another dimension besides armed fighting and forceful occupation of halls. This may be termed economic

authority consisting of the Provost, and the tutors? They seem to be merely onlookers — at times crying out in despair. This malady is not limited to Dhaka University. It has infected all other Universities, and even colleges throughout the country (DS 18.7.96). Just add a few recent ones to this scenario. "Outsiders" have gunned down two BAU students on campus. The BCL held JCD responsible for the incident (DS 10.11.96). Police rescued a DU student-cum-businessman from the Surya Sen Hall (DS 16.11.96). Police arrested four JCD activists including the Jagannath Hall organising secre-

te called the battle of halls...

... A particular group of students gains control of a particular hall — the means employed are not clear to me — and then decides the fate of new entrants. The new entrants must somehow get their passport from the dominating group. And if they do not already come with right credentials, they must at least pledge their active support to the group in all future occasions — like joining a procession and casting their votes for party candidates. If the new entrants is politically uninvolved yet, a quick rite of initiation follows and as often as not, one who came as a student soon matures into a cadre, or at least a camp follower....

.... A hall of residence in our university has become a citadel of a few student leaders. They enjoy a special status — best room, free food, a salute of the staff — and all these under the very nose of the hall administration. If the Provost and the House Tutors belong to the same hierarchy of which the Vice Chancellor is the apex and if there is a secret or not so secret bond between the hall administration and the student leaders, and if thing being so, the hall is used as a sanctuary by criminals, some students and the rest outsiders, then what we get is a hall of residence in the present shape... teachers and students have their separate beds and the halls are reserved for the students. (DS 15.11.96).

This long quote is intentionally provided to get a first hand impression from the horses mouth. Now compare what the fathers of the university wanted their halls to be like: "... to play an important part in its social and intellectual life. The university teachers... attached to each hall and... responsible for the general guidance of students... for their tutorial care in special subjects... and the halls intended to serve residential and tutorial functions... the Provost and the House Tutors should be responsible for discipline in the hall life and they would advise students as regards their studies and other matters... (quoted in Rahim, op cit). Admittedly, one must conclude from such comparison of intent and consequences that the unintended consequences have overtaken the intent lock, stock, and barrel. Obviously, the Provost and the House Tutors have ceased their guidance and tutorial functions. If they didn't, things could not have come to such a pass.

## What Must be Done:

Hopefully, we have a clear picture of what our halls have become. Now, the question : What must be done? Must we continue with the halls or must we do away with halls? If we do away with halls, what consequences must we face? All students will become non-residential — living in their own houses, hostels, or other private arrangements. Instead of Provost and House Tutors, they will now be guided and tutored by parents, guardians, or other relatives. In any case, even with a dozen halls, not all students of DU can reside in halls. We can look up to the Calcutta University — the oldest and one of the best Universities in this Subcontinent — still does not have any halls for students. To deal with the growing number, the CU has organised its activi-

ties into several campuses in different parts of the city. We might consider the CU model in this regard. The DU campus with so many halls in one area is a high population concentration which by itself is beset with problems that go with high density. Not to speak of the members of the public, even students and teachers don't consider the area safe for passage after dusk.

Every government since independence has liberally sanctioned money for building new halls for students to meet the growing need. But instead of decreasing the intensity of the problem, it has increased it by leaps and bounds. One dozen or so halls have not enabled the students to reside in halls. Another dozen will not help either — rather it will aggravate this situation. Decentralising DU into small campuses in three or four major areas might be an alternative. There might be other alternatives — eg, arranging compulsory night classes, workshops, and community service — for the students thus keeping them busy at night under strict discipline. The students will receive marks for such class attendance, workshop performance and community service — to be included in their final Degree certificates.

**Compulsory Curricula :** Compulsory Primary Education, Primary Health Care, Community Medicine, Social Forestry, Cultivation of live-stock, poultry, fish, Cottage industry, Cooperation in law and order maintenance, traffic police, Cooperatives, Tree plantation and maintenance, road maintenance, canal digging, sanitation and similar such activities must form part of university students — no matter whatever is their specialisation in terms of Degrees. Education in these fields is necessary to make a full man. In weightage, one-third of the curricula should go to theoretical studies, one third to research, and one-third to community service following the Indonesian "Tri-Dharma" a three-principle approach to education, viz (i) Knowledge (ii) Research and (3) Social Service. Education is meant for making a complete man — he must acquire knowledge to face life, he must research to test his knowledge and he must apply his knowledge and research to community service. For an educated person is a responsible person — responsible to his parents, his country, and humanity. Unless he serves others, he is self-centred, he uses his education to augment his own status without regard to others.

Such a responsible, orientation to education makes sense when the family, the government, and even the international community foot the bill of education. For every student at the University level, government expenditure is not negligible. The student must pay back something — cash, kind or service. Thus the purpose of education is linked to what one does with education. To think of education in terms of Degrees and money is devoid of any social obligation and unrelated to any higher duty. Thus the purpose of education is related to the structure of education and a philosophy guiding it. In this vein, the halls of residence for students must be judged in terms of contribution made to making a person useful to family, country, and humanity. As we have observed in the foregoing paragraphs, halls in their present shape are unable to perform this role — intellectually and socially.

A question may be asked : Why should a Humanities, Social Sciences, Biological Sci-

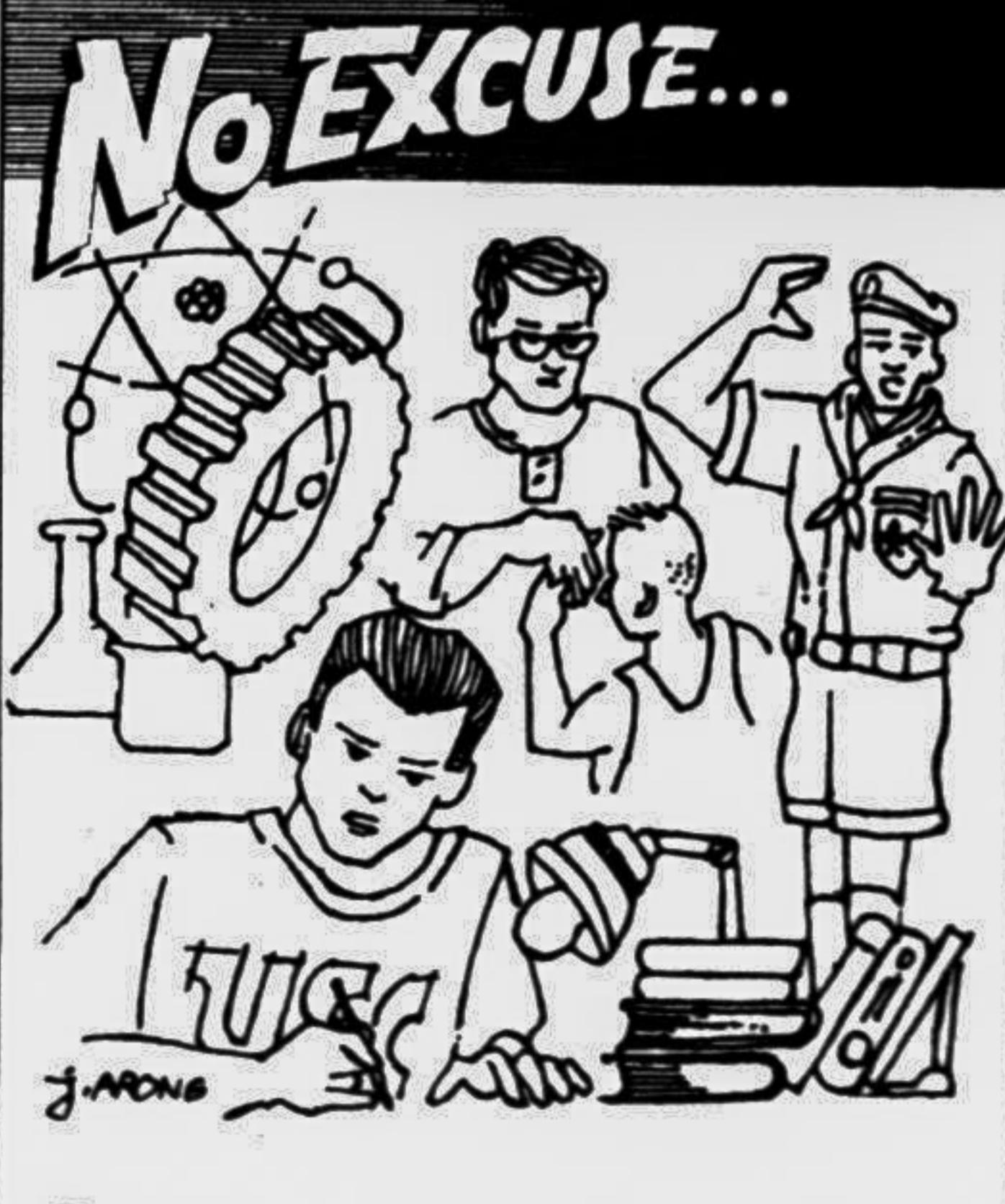
ences student study "compulsory curricula" indicated earlier which has no direct bearing on his specialisation? The answer lies in relating specialisation to real life needs and problems. Unless a student learns about the 'compulsory curricula' and internalises the values developed in terms of care of and concern for his environment, he is a mere technically oriented person without understanding how his technicality relates to the larger social environment and the over-arching human and moral values supporting the technicality.

Thus considering a mundane hall situation raises moral and ethical issues — the purpose and uses of education — values imbibed and applied by students living in halls. Readers are referred to the original intents of the founding fathers of the university — "social and intellectual life... general guidance, tutorial care, students and teachers... one community working to one purpose and helping each other to a common end..." are conspicuous by their absence. The University Chancellor induced a graduate on this occasion of the Convocation (now fallen into disuse) with these words: "...I confer upon you the Degree of... and I charge you that by your conduct and character you prove your self worthy of the same." We have noted what conduct and character some hall residents are demonstrating. What do we hear of them? Students in halls — many of them, if not all — have been branded as gunfighters, toll exactors, business men and contractors — labels guardians would shudder to associate their wards with. Some of them even misbehave with their teachers. So what can we expect of such students when they come out of the University?

**Hall, Mind, Activity** It seems the hall residents have not received any moral education whatsoever during their stay on campus. It is not the failure of students only. It is also our failure as parents, teachers, and exemplars. Parents send their wards and pay for their stay in halls, and consider that their job is done. Teachers lecture in the classroom and think that they have no other duty. Political parties have complicated the situation further by encouraging hall students to be members/activists of their front organisations. The hall situation is devoid of any moral teaching and ethical examples. The growing number of hall residents and their polarisation on political party lines, hall occupying and allowing only party supporters and gunfighting among groups for show of strength, toll collecting and defying hall authorities have made things worse. The net result that no hall is manageable morally, intellectually and administratively.

This brings up the question of the value of education and its application in society. Education for what? How? Where? These are asked. Education must produce an integrated man uniting mind and activity (John Dewey, Democracy and Education, 1976). Mind must be trained i.e. cultivated to internalise moral lessons and activity must be disciplined and socially responsible. Cultivated mind and responsible activity — their integration — are the hall marks of educated persons. Judged in these terms, our hall education has failed.

The writer is an ex-Professor of Chittagong University and an ex-Member, Directing Staff of Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre, Sylhet, Dhaka.



Education is vital for progress. An effective education system needs strong scientific and technological content. It should include character formation and promote social responsibility.

DEPTHnews

or financial dimension — or toll collection dimension. The rivalry between two groups has mounted over toll collection from a 10-crore-taka construction work near the Science Library. (DS 19.8.96).

The other facet is splintering or factionalism on the hall occupying business. The BCL is reportedly divided into two rival factions — the Faridpur faction has strong holds in four halls — Jagannath, Salimullah, Zahurul Haq Halls while the Gopalganj faction has but treasured its hold in Shahidullah Hall (DS 19.8.96). In the same style, JCD has consolidated its position in Mohsin Hall. Surya Sen Hall, Zaur Rahman Hall, Gangabandhu Hall and Sir A F Rahman Hall (DS, ibid). So on and so forth. Later reports indicated that the Faridpur faction of BCL had captured Mohsin Hall and ousted JCD activists from there. Do all these indicate that there is a Hall au-

tomatic of the arrested two are DU students and two are outsiders. Thus we come across another new phenomenon of "student-cum-businessman." The rescued student has printing business in the Bokash Market at Nilkhali DS (ibid). The recent incidents at Jagannath Hall portends similar prognosis.

The entire gamut of the scenario has been epitomised by Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, a former VC of JU in another article. "The halls of residence have become a potent cause of our trouble on the campus. Sooner or later, the Universities, as they grow in size, find the problem of accommodation as one which defies an easy solution. The race between the number of admissions and the number of available seats is unequal. Much of the tension on the campus is centred round these problems. By a curious combination of factors, it has finally given rise to what may

be called the battle of halls...

... A particular group of students gains control of a particular hall — the means employed are not clear to me — and then decides the fate of new entrants. The new entrants must somehow get their passport from the dominating group. And if they do not already come with right credentials, they must at least pledge their active support to the group in all future occasions — like joining a procession and casting their votes for party candidates. If the new entrants is politically uninvolved yet, a quick rite of initiation follows and as often as not, one who came as a student soon matures into a cadre, or at least a camp follower....

.... A hall of residence in our university has become a citadel of a few student leaders. They enjoy a special status — best room, free food, a salute of the staff — and all these under the very nose of the hall administration.

If the Provost and the House Tutors belong to the same hierarchy of which the Vice Chancellor is the apex and if there is a secret or not so secret bond between the hall administration and the student leaders, and if thing being so, the hall is used as a sanctuary by criminals, some students and the rest outsiders, then what we get is a hall of residence in the present shape... teachers and students have their separate beds and the halls are reserved for the students. (DS 15.11.96).

This long quote is intentionally provided to get a first hand impression from the horses mouth. Now compare what the fathers of the university wanted their halls to be like: "... to play an important part in its social and intellectual life. The university teachers... attached to each hall and... responsible for the general guidance of students... for their tutorial care in special subjects... and the halls intended to serve residential and tutorial functions... the Provost and the House Tutors should be responsible for discipline in the hall life and they would advise students as regards their studies and other matters... (quoted in Rahim, op cit). Admittedly, one must conclude from such comparison of intent and consequences that the unintended consequences have overtaken the intent lock, stock, and barrel. Obviously, the Provost and the House Tutors have ceased their guidance and tutorial functions. If they didn't, things could not have come to such a pass.

## What Must be Done:

Hopefully, we have a clear picture of what our halls have become. Now, the question : What must be done? Must we continue with the halls or must we do away with halls? If we do away with halls, what consequences must we face? All students will become non-residential — living in their own houses, hostels, or other private arrangements. Instead of Provost and House Tutors, they will now be guided and tutored by parents, guardians, or other relatives. In any case, even with a dozen halls, not all students of DU can reside in halls. We can look up to the Calcutta University — the oldest and one of the best Universities in this Subcontinent — still does not have any halls for students. To deal with the growing number, the CU has organised its activi-

ties into several campuses in different parts of the city. We might consider the CU model in this regard. The DU campus with so many halls in one area is a high population concentration which by itself is beset with problems that go with high density. Not to speak of the members of the public, even students and teachers don't consider the area safe for passage after dusk.

Every government since independence has liberally sanctioned money for building new halls for students to meet the growing need. But instead of decreasing the intensity of the problem, it has increased it by leaps and bounds. One dozen or so halls have not enabled the students to reside in halls. Another dozen will not help either — rather it will aggravate this situation. Decentralising DU into small campuses in three or four major areas might be an alternative. There might be other alternatives — eg, arranging compulsory night classes, workshops, and community service — to be included in their final Degree certificates.

**Compulsory Curricula :** Compulsory Primary Education, Primary Health Care, Community Medicine, Social Forestry, Cultivation of live-stock, poultry, fish, Cottage industry, Cooperation in law and order maintenance, traffic police, Cooperatives, Tree plantation and maintenance, road maintenance, canal digging, sanitation and similar such activities must form part of university students — no matter whatever is their specialisation in terms of Degrees. Education in these fields is necessary to make a full man. In weightage, one-third of the curricula should go to theoretical studies, one third to research, and one-third to community service following the Indonesian "Tri-Dharma" a three-principle approach to education, viz (i) Knowledge (ii) Research and (3) Social Service. Education is meant for making a complete man — he must acquire knowledge to face life, he must research to test his knowledge and he must apply his knowledge and research to community service. For an educated person is a responsible person — responsible to his parents, his country, and humanity. Unless he serves others, he is self-centred, he uses his education to augment his own status without regard to others.

Such a responsible, orientation to education makes sense when the family, the government, and even the international community foot the bill of education. For every student at the University level, government expenditure is not negligible. The student must pay back something — cash, kind or service. Thus the purpose of education is linked to what one does with education. To think of education in terms of Degrees and money is devoid of any social obligation and unrelated to any higher duty. Thus the purpose of education is related to the structure of education and a philosophy guiding it. In this vein, the halls of residence for students must be judged in terms of contribution made to making a person useful to family, country, and humanity. As we have observed in the foregoing paragraphs, halls in their present shape are unable to perform this role — intellectually and socially.

A question may be asked :