

# Feature

## A Menace Called Eve-teasing

Bangladeshi women are hardly safe on the streets. Eve-teasers harass every woman from granddaughters to grandmothers. As experts blame bad upbringing for the menace, social thinkers wonder when it will end, writes Farzana Khan

On a bright morning last month two teenage girls were crossing the Farmgate footbridge on their way to nearby Holy Cross School, when three rakish young men blocked their path. "Hi sexy! Let's go to Chandrima Udayan and have fun," one of them said as others pushed the terrified girls to the railing. As the terrified girls screamed for help and people started approaching them, the terrible trio fled. No harm was done to the girls but the incident left a deep scar in their psyche.

They have lost their freedom as there is now always someone from their families to escort them to school. Their school is within the walking distance from their homes. Walking to school is no longer possible. They have to ride rickshaws even if that means a detour.

"Since then, we go to our school by rickshaw and never try to cross the road through the footbridge," said Mitu, a Class Eight student of Holy Cross School.

Another schoolgirl, Imarat, who reads in class nine at Vikramnagar School, was teased in a different manner. She said: "I used to walk to my school because it is in my neighbourhood. One day a group of boys waylaid me and pushed a slip into my hand which read: 'We will teach you a good lesson if you don't come to the place where we asked you to go for.'"

I immediately rushed home and described the whole incident to my mother and my mom didn't allow me to go to school for the next two days, Imarat said.

After the incident, she goes to school along with mother and return home with dad although both of them are working people. They suffer a lot of for my security."

Such disconcerting tales are told not only by young girls. Women as old as their mothers too endure similar harassment on streets.

Munira Dilshad, a middle-aged housewife of Siddeshwari, said: "I was returning home in an auto-rickshaw along with my husband and my daughter from the recently concluded International Trade Fair. We had to get down from the three wheelers a few yards away from our residence. There was some repairing job going on."

"My daughter," she said, "was walking ahead of me while my husband fell way behind of us as he was carrying a heavy shopping bag."

"I had seen a group of youths chatting alongside the road. When I came closer to them one of them commented, 'Challu, Ma!' (meaning very attractive lady) while another shouted, 'What is your size?'"

The young girls are vulnerable to such nuisance everywhere; on buses, rickshaws and auto-rickshaws, on the streets and even on the campus.

According to psychiatrists, these pervasive perverse acts gradually lead the naughty boys towards committing rape, abduction, killing and acid attack on girls. These days eve-teasing has reached a stage that even minor girls and old women are not safe any more.

Dr Syeda Anwar Haq, a noted psychiatrist of the country, believes that eve-teasing has its root in various social norms that allow the boys to neglect the girls.

"This discrimination in fact begins within the family first," she says.

Another psychiatrist, who preferred anonymity, said one religious cleric that restrict boys from freely mixing with girls help develop such perversions.

There are many ways, from indecent gestures to vulgar comments to harass girls on the streets.

"They don't hesitate to even throw burning cigarettes and used chewing gums on girls. If a girl finds herself caught in any crowd at any market, fair and social programme, she will invariably be harassed physically or otherwise. The hands of ruffians would make an unpleasant journey through her body," said a university girl.

Not only young boys are offenders. They have their adult partners too.

One can split them into several age groups: 12-15, 16-20, 21-27, 28-35, 36-45 and 46-55. Each age group has its own way of harassment.

Those who belong to the 12-15 age group are in fact immature in passing comments. In most cases they follow their "big brothers". Their comments include, "Come on beauty!", "I will marry you", "I cannot close my eyes" etc. The boys of this age group normally come from lower-middle class families.

And those who belong to the 16-20 age group are mostly cine-goers and majority of them come from lower-middle class or have no families. They keep standing in front of girls' schools or colleges instead of attending their own classes.

Even the boys from good and cultured families sometimes join in. This group deem themselves as cinema heroes and try to imitate the styles of prominent stars in smoking, clothes and hair style. They are usually daring and do not hesitate to misbehave with their parents if they try to exercise control over them.

The most daring ones come closer to the girls and paste vulgar messages in girls' dresses with scotch tapes. Girls hardly dare to protest their activities because that will mean more humiliation and shame or even physical assault.

Some come riding motorbikes. They waylay the girls whenever they get the opportunity and make indecent proposals. They will not hesitate to touch the sensitive organs of girls if they can. In most cases, this group is found involved in kidnapping.

Members of the 30-35 age group pretend to be gentlemen and take advantage of rush and crowd. Many of them are married. They roam around markets, and various social and cultural functions, and their quick hands make their way through a woman's body whenever there is a chance.

And those who belong to the 46-55 age group have their own children too. Even then they are found active in eve-teasing. But they are more cautious and they wait for a solid chance lest they be caught by their acquaintances or by their own children.

Rickshaw-pullers, bus drivers and their helpers and shop owners are also among the eve-teasers.

The eve-teasing has now become a social disease. Some 80 per cent families, particularly those who have girls, are victims. To fight this menacing problem we need to build a social movement," said a Dhaka University teacher.

—News Network



The Santal school in Barshapara, Rajshahi

## Getting Started

While the country claims a literacy rate of 74 per cent for male and 51 per cent for female, it is virtually nil for its tribal populace. The first and only Santal school in Barshapara, Rajshahi has recently been founded. When the clamour over literacy and education has reached its peak, the Santals in Barshapara have just taken the first step with the establishment of the first Santal school, writes Fazle Rabbani

It takes half an hour to reach Barshapara, a Santal village, some five kilometres from the Rajshahi-Nawabganj highway, inaccessible by any kind of motor vehicle other than two wheelers. For about 2,000 Santal families with a population of well over 10,000, a tubewell and the faraway highway are the only signs of the modern world. When clamour over literacy and education has reached its peak, a completely different story has started unfolding in this village. The first and only Santal school has recently been established entirely by the efforts of the local Santal community.

Literacy for development has been acquiring growing significance in the modernisation process. Progressive thinkers project literacy as an actively connected with transformation of reality and its preservation, instead of conventional notion of treating it as an agency of transmitting knowledge. It is from this point of view literacy can be linked with socio-political and socio-economic dynamics of a country. Developing countries, largely in the pursuit of economic development, evaluate literacy in terms of material gains. Many planning agencies concerned with literacy now profess linking literacy programs with development in terms of per capita growth rate. Officially Bangladesh claims a literacy rate of 74 per cent for male and 51 per cent for female respectively, but in the tribal areas it is virtually nil. These areas are forming pockets of typical backward areas where even communication becomes hazardous. When the mass literacy programs like, Non-Formal Education Programme, Total Literacy Movement, Adult Literacy Programme are yielding good results, the large section of tribal people remain out of the reach of such programs. Due to the difference of their languages they have never benefited from the education programmes of the country.

The Santal community living in this part of the country has come to this land far back in the middle of the last century. In 1847 when the British Raj started laying down railway tracks in this region they came as labourers and stayed back. The homeland of this community is in the heart of Indian subcontinent, the Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and some areas of the West Bengal. They have been living in this land from the prehistoric time. The Santal language is said to be one of the oldest languages of South Asia, older than any modern South Asian languages. It has a strong tradition of orally transmitted literature. A century of neglect from both the state and the society has left this oldest habitat of the land indigent.

Early attempts of spreading literacy among the Santals were made by the Lutheran mission in 1896 and by the Catholic mission in 1909. The Catholic mission even tried to introduce Roman script for the Santal language and established a press for Santal publications. Some of the books and magazines published by the mission are still preserved in the Asiatic Society library in Calcutta. Work on bridging the gap between indigenous communities and modern society is under way in other countries of the world. In India an attempt was made to introduce an original script, named *Alchiki* for Santal language, but somehow it did not get coined. But they have successfully introduced an education policy that promotes languages of smaller communities. The three-tier education policy with the basic assumption that every one has the right to get education in his or her mother tongue has been in function for over two decades. It promotes education in mother tongue at the primary level, education in one of the regional languages at the secondary level and education in English or in Hindi at the tertiary level. Recently some universities have been established to promote education in regional languages as well.

The most essential benefit of such a policy is that people of smaller language communities start acquiring the language and education of the larger community, which automatically initiates a process of national integration within the country. Moreover education makes them able to enter the job market of the country, and thus they can bring substantial materialistic changes to their own society. One good example of this kind of manipulation of the instrumental value of language is the United States. To meet assimilationist goals of the society the US government

patronises education in minority languages both of their own society and of the migrated peoples. Bodies like UN and Unesco have declared that the minority groups reserve the right to maintain their languages. Several European Parliament resolutions advocate the use of indigenous languages throughout education, in the media, and in dealings with public authorities. The council of proposed European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages also have similar goals.

The myth, Bangladesh is a monolingual country, has created a policy framework for the government where the languages of the small communities are shamelessly neglected. For the people who fought for their language only half a century back this is an ugly face to divulge. From a different point of view this kind of policy framework creates space for a type of internal colonialisation. In the long run which ponderously costs the politics and economy of any country. Our recent realisations of the tribal problems of Chittagong Hill Tracts will approve this. A reality of language is that it is not only a medium of communication; it is also a mechanism of socialisation, a marker of identity, and an instrument of solidarity. Any restriction of language use will cause resistance from the speech community. The resistance gives birth to a dominant-dominated relationship, and may take form of a political movement or a non-cooperation with the dominating community. In fact due to our colonial hangover this type of relationship exists in the psyche of administration and politics. A sensitive government should be able to break such a relationship and usher in a new horizon both for tribal communities and us.

To make a headway school is the best institution. At the same time research on the language, its linguistics and sociolinguistics, a strong database of texts of different genres will help promote the cause of a pragmatic language policy from the government.

The writer works as a visiting faculty with the English department, North South University, and has recently initiated a field study on Santal language.

# Education System Needs an Overhaul

A recent cabinet meeting has objected to the 13 points on the proposed education policy by the National Committee on Education Policy (NCEP). If the objections are sustained, it will be suicidal for the nation, fears Asif Sadeque

THE news that the cabinet has objected to the 13 points on the proposed education policy by the National Committee on Education Policy (NCEP) under the chairmanship of Professor M. Shamsul Huq has drawn public attention. If the objections are sustained, it will be suicidal for the nation.

It is common knowledge that "real and practical education" must not only enable us to read and write but also enlighten us and help us to be self-sufficient. In the context of Bangladesh, out of 120 million people, about 50 million are illiterate in conventional terminology. However, these 50 million are not capable of being self-sufficient by dint of the education they received.

NCEP proposed that up to class eight, education should be free and compulsory for every body and education this far should be considered primary education, the current level being only upto class five. It said, "The existing five-year long primary education system is not enough for student to achieve requisite literacy, knowledge, ability, attitudes and values for solving problems of life. Duration of preparation for students has increased throughout the world due to increasing complexity of life and society."

The main obstacle that the Cabinet has pointed out is the shortage of funds. A mere 1.8 per cent of the GNP in 1972-73, the allotment in the education sector has been increased only to a meagre 2.3 per cent in recent years. In 1974, the Qudrat-e-Khuda commission had recommended a five per cent allotment, to be gradually increased to seven per cent within a very short time. Twenty-five years down the road, we're still grappling with the issue of funds. This proves that we were never serious about the expansion of education. Among our neighbours today, India spends 3.7 per cent and Nepal 2.9 per cent, both way ahead of us.

Given the present financial condition, the Government could still allot more money from the national income. A 1994 World Bank report said, "There are several main ways in which Government can mobilise greater private financing: cost sharing with students, raising funds from alumni, external resources and engaging in other income-generating activities." In this connection, NCEP also pleaded with the Cabinet for establishing an "Education Bank".

This was the third time that the government took the initiative to create a committee on education commission. NCEP has the right policy now. However, the Cabinet's obstinacy could easily frustrate its implementation. It is not fair to our educationists that they are asked to formulate one policy after another only to be thrown out at the end citing preposterous reasons.

The committee has addressed the need for vocational and technical education very strongly. Development strategies and methods are going through rapid changes through out the world due to new inventions and innovations of science and technology. In the free market economy developing countries are always facing an unequal and adverse competition in trade and commerce. Transport, marketing of finished products, export of skilled manpower and communication.

In light of the foregoing, the committee has recommended as under:

1) All curriculum of secondary level (including Madrasa education) should be made vocational in phases in order to create skilled manpower at national ability level three, two and one. Through co-ordination of mills and factories and the vocational institutions, a sandwich course is to be introduced to produce master-craftsmen.

2) In place of the existing three-year diploma courses with two months field study in all technical education, three and a half-year course with six-month field study will be introduced. The number of polytechnic institutes and similar other institutes should be increased for the expansion of technical education.

3) Students completing technical diploma courses should be given opportunities for admission into the relevant degree courses of higher studies (engineering, textile, agriculture etc.) through co-ordination of credits.

4) Engineering and other diploma courses should be introduced in two shifts to ascertain maximum utilisation of infrastructure facilities of vocational and technical institutes.

5) Non-formal training of national ability levels basic trade third, second and first shall be arranged for the school dropouts by utilising the facilities of vocational, diploma in engineering and diploma where engineering and other vocational diplomas re offered.

6) In vocational and technical institutes teacher-student ratio should be fixed at 1:10.

7) Training for the teachers for all the levels as well as practical training in relevant fields at mills and factories should be made compulsory. Training scopes for the teachers of all the vocational and technical institutes should be expanded by increasing the number of VITI and TTC and through Distance Education necessary training facilities should be created for them.

8) Arrangements should be made to develop, translate and publish sufficient books in Bangla for vocational and technical education.

If the proposed education policy is implemented immediately, our manpower export will be enhanced both quantitatively and qualitatively. This is also true for our domestic market.

Another pragmatic and far-sighted recommendation was to divide the whole education system into the following three stages:

1. class one to class eight (primary)

2. class nine to class twelve (secondary)

3. Higher education.

We must bear this in mind that this is an integrated system and must not be accepted in this part. Acceptance on any piece-meal of the proposed policy, the synchronisation of the aforementioned stages will break.

The committee has recommended elimination of Secondary School Certificate (S.S.C) examinations and opined that at the end of class ten an internal exam should be held under the new name Secondary (first part). The final exam should be held at the end of class twelve. The final result of Secondary Education is to be determined by the aggregation of marks of the first and second parts after co-ordination of results of internal examinations. If a student fails to continue

studies after the Secondary Examination Part One at the end of class ten, he would be given a mark-sheet from the Board and the school would give him a school leaving certificate.

The Cabinet fears that the proposed system will allow more students to pass class ten making it difficult to accommodate them in colleges. But a close scrutiny of the report will reveal that passing class ten will not necessarily send one to college. The committee has opined to stick to the prevailing college entrance exams. This way, those who are not qualified for college or wish not to continue further education will be phased out of the education system but they would nonetheless have a solid vocational and technical background.

So, the physical facilities of primary schools, particularly the number of teachers are to be increased to a great extent. The following steps can be taken in primary level education:

a) Classes from one to five will have to be termed as lower primary and those from class six to eight as higher primary.

Duration of general primary education will have to be extended gradually to six years by 2003, seven years by 2006, eight years by 2010.

c) Most of the primary schools at present, consist of only three class rooms; a minimum of five class rooms should be ensured for every primary school by the year 2000, and then three more class rooms and separate library room should be gradually added.

d) In keeping with the gradual extension of duration of primary education, the number of teachers should be increased so that the teacher-student ratio may be determined at 1:35. Subject-teachers with higher academic qualifications are to be appointed for the classes from six to eight.

e) Standard primary education has to be ensured to produce good citizens according to the demands of the 21st century.

Against the backdrop of these recommendations, the Cabinet pointed out that not all of the 88,500 villages of the country had primary schools and out of them a great number were in a state of ruin. Under these circumstances, the Cabinet insisted on expanding the prevailing primary education system (upto class five) to every village that are currently lacking primary education facilities rather than accepting the new concept of primary education.

Government's excuses of fund shortage don't seem to get in the way of building colossal conference centres and five Star hotels for the purpose of accommodating the delegates of the forthcoming NAM summit. Why then all the whining when it comes to investing into the education sector for the sake of the future generations?

The writer of this article is a graduate (M. S. S) in International Relations from the University of Dhaka, a devoted social worker and a businessman by profession.

## TV Guide

Friday 4th June  
(All programmes are in local time. The Daily Star will not be responsible for any change in the programme)

### BBC

6:00 BBC World News  
6:05 BBC World News  
6:10 World Living: Talking Movies  
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