The Deserving and the Deprived

Deeni Fatiha

A common custom practiced throughout the world is to award excellence in the academic arena. However, today I want to hold forth an exception; I want to cite an example in which the deserving are deprived. To be precise, I want to talk about us the students studying the British curriculum in Bangladesh.

Whether in an online discussion with a foreign friend or a family dinner thrown in honour of a cousin who has earned several national awards for a GPA 5 in her HSC exams, students studying the British curriculum always have to feel embarrassed, neglected and somewhat inferior when they are questioned about the formal recognition of their achievements. Currently an A' level student myself, I am well aware of how students in our system have to face false accusations and preconceived prejudice about themselves and our system from the outside world. Nevertheless, what bothers me and my peers the most is that no matter how high a level of academic excellence we reach, we are deprived of national appreciation. Besides holding forth some problems confronted by students in our system, the purpose of my writing is merely to demand an answer as to why our attainments are being so keenly overlooked by the government, while students of the national curriculum are being heartily appreciated.

The British curriculum is being taught in Bangladesh for a few decades now, though the proportion of students enrolled in this system has drastically increased over the last decade or so. In response, countless English medium schools and many proficient teachers have come into being; and over time, the opportunity of studying in these expensive schools has broadened. The bottom line English medium students can not anymore be called a minority. Surprisingly, however, one would expect a minority group to receive more attention from the government than being currently focused on us.

Students studying the British curriculum are not only participating in a global scholastic competition, that too via a second language, but are also succeeding in acquiring scores that make mouths drop worldwide. We have grown rather blasé about overseas students getting highest marks in numerous subjects and breaking a few records here and there. We gain admissions in universities like Harvard, Princeton, MIT, the National University of Singapore, etc., that too with scholarships which even the locals there rarely get. It is us, who eventually go on to compete in the international job market. And all along, it is us who represent Bangladesh in the international academic arena - holding forth the talent, perseverance and devotion that lie within a challenged country like ours. Then why is it that the thousands of GPA-5 earners of the national curriculum are being celebrated and honoured by the government and various private organizations, while all we get is The Daily Star award?

Dear reader, I mean no offence to the students of the national curriculum, I am just asking if we are any less of an asset to the country than the GPA-5 earners? Does studying the British curriculum, earning degrees from international universities make us any less of a Bangladeshi? Then what is the cause for this discrimination?

I guess you are wondering whether accusing the government of discrimination is not being a little too harsh. Well, discriminated is what we feel when everything is literally put to a hold during the SSC/HSC exams, while strikes are called during the O/A level exams. Many of my friends have had to sit for an exam at one o' clock at night, only because their exam schedule was obstructed by a strike. I would say they were fortunate compared to those who had to drop an exam completely because of a continuous strike of several days. It should be relevant to mention that O/A level exams are held throughout the world on the same date at coordinated times. The schedule cannot be changed worldwide just because there is a strike in Bangladesh.

Another accusation we often encounter is that we give too much importance to English in our syllabus, though we study Bangla as a subject in our O' level course. I find it rather absurd, because schools teaching the national curriculum in English are flourishing throughout the country - even the cadet schools have opted to teach by this method. Meanwhile, the government is only encouraging them by providing the board's books translated in English. Dear reader, can you blame us for feeling neglected?

The fact is that the government is so less bothered about private education and associated institutions; it is as if we are an alienated part of the country. Lacking liability and a common superior authority, most private educational institutions have become money-sucking machines. Some schools are even charging hundreds of taka just to attest the exam forms of their own students (the schools receive free forms from the British Council and all they have to do is put a seal on it)! So whoever wants his/her child to study the British curriculum is compelled to surrender to the mercy of these "business-oriented educational institutions".

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