Monastery of Machines

Omar Rashid Chowdhury

It was a brazen April day. As I was walking on an asphalt path, few impressive structures were standing boastfully. Gargantuan they were and echoed a deep, all-pervading music - the music of the machines. In front of me, was a brick-paved terrace, red and glazing in the brilliant sun. Trees aligned on the right while on the left, a portico with a flight of steps looked down on it, the entrance to the auditorium with a trapezoidal side. But the first to meet the eye is the large rectangular entrance with a portico supported by a column, with two steps leading to a wood and glass paneled door. La Café. To its right rose a cement coloured six-storied library with high windows running along the whole length. I was in a monastery of machines. I was in the central campus of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET).

BUET has a rich and proud history of offering the best engineering and technological knowledge in Bangladesh, dating back to 1876 when it took roots as the Dhaka Survey School at Nalgola. Later it was moved to the present premises in 1912 with the name Ahsanullah School of Engineering. In 1947, it emerged as Ahsanullah Engineering College (AEC) and in 1962 East Pakistan University of Engineering and Technology (EPUET). After the glorious War of Liberation, EPUET was renamed as Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. About 60 years has passed in the evolution of AEC to BUET. Six decades of glory and achievements, of humble service to the nation producing batches of brilliant professors, engineers, researchers, analysts, specialists and cutting edge researches along with experiments, studies and structures. But, are these the only milestones that set BUET on the highest seat of honour in the history of engineering education in our country? No. There still remains something that makes a difference. It flows through BUET. Anybody would understand it when he will look at the shadows of the massive buildings and the aged trees which create geometric plans on the asphalts. It is perseverance, tenacity, confidence and an insatiable thirst to know and create the perfect. It is the solemn silence of a solitary sage.

The campus is lively with indiscriminate chatting, students scurrying with lab reports and assignments, chorus and callous singing, 'intellectuals' debating their head off over an experimental result, a rag corner (at the right corner of the café) with music reverberating through the whole cafe and other sundries of a campus life. Yet, beyond all these and including all these, a faint but deep hymn is being played. Something great is at work here. As one passes the faculty buildings, the workshops, the labs, a deep murmur reaches the ears. The rhythmic rumble of giant machines, busy footsteps hurrying to class or lab, all meld into one chorus. In this monastery precise knowledge is sought and applied. Machines here chime the time. Giant juggernauts roll into delicate jobs with unbelievable swiftness and harmony, in the workshops and labs. The boiler lab puffing out clouds of smoke now and then, in the machine shop great grinding machines smoothening rough surfaces till they shine, gear-cutters shaping gears with minute preciseness, concrete lab groaning with the rolling of huge wheels, it all constantly reminds of a very versatile and great laboratory, where wonders are constantly created and new challenges frequently emerge to mesmerize an observer. And yet, paradoxically, among these metallic hubbub, you would see greenery a vista surrounding the campus.

The gigantic faculty buildings stand out clearly for their architectural uniqueness. The oldest is the Old Academic Building (OAB). The faculty building for Electrical and Electronics Engineering in Polashi is the latest addition. A unique design marks the central auditorium complex as an example of brilliant architecture. All roads lead to the café in the campus. A place not only for having snacks; it is the centre of gravity of the campus. It is an all in one place for endless and meaningless gossiping, singing, studying, partying, dating and meetings. Another popular place for all these is the premise itself. This is one place where you will always encounter students wearing saggy clothes immersed into some new project.

To the students, BUET is like the second home. There is no show of pompousness and disproportionate, uncouth decorations abundant in some novo entities. Reflections of the long and glorious decades remind us of an aristocracy attained not by mere chance but by years of pursuit for knowledge and service.