



Bangla and the study of science

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Our 21st February has now made place beyond our borders and has become a pride for the whole world. UNESCO has recognised 21st February as International Mother Language Day to honour sacrifices made by the youth of our nation for the mother tongue. No nation has had to sacrifice life for its mother tongue as we have done. We are proud of our language. The first Nobel Prize to Asia came through poems and songs written by Rabindranath Tagore written in our language. National anthem of not only Bangladesh but also of India was written in our language. Three hundred million people of the world speak this language, and it is the 6th most spoken language and second in the sub-continent. Colonial rules are over; independence has been achieved after heroic struggle. But sadly the country does not appear to have progressed well. We are yet to surpass our achievements on science and technology of the colonial days. Keeping in mind the hopes and aspirations of the common masses, with which they fought against a well-equipped army and achieved independence, we must take effective steps to walk on the path of progress.

One thousandth part of the landmass of the world belongs to Bangladesh and 24 thousandths part of the population of the world, and the country is feeding this huge a population, giving shelter and healthcare in absence of any significant natural wealth.

In the knowledge-based society of the 21st century and that too under globalised competition, there is no alternative to being skilled in science and technology. But unfortunately our share in the world repository of knowledge appears to be getting thinner and thinner with time. 40-50 years back, young people of different neighbouring countries like Malaysia and Korea used to come to our country for education. Now the trend is opposite -- our students are going to those countries for education. This stream has to be reversed. The country that has only human resources as surplus must seek its progress in development of human resources. Statistics of the previous years indicate that our young people do not have interest in studying science as was the case some 40-50 years back. As a result, science enrolment is declining every year. We should study this phenomenon and see whether lack of science textbooks in Bangla is contributing in any way to this trend.

In particular, English language is very rich in foreign words. French people may not like to speak English as is the case with English people but the fact is that 29 percent of English words have their origins in French. In the process, English language has become rich. The same is true in case of German words in English. In fact there is seldom any language that English language was not enriched by. Who cares that the words banana and chimpanzee were borrowed from West Africa, as admiral, chemistry, alcohol, algebra, cipher, cotton, giraffe, guitar, typhoon, sugar and traffic from Arabic, dollar and robot from Czech, culture from Finnish, blue, cabbage,

January, March, May, June, November, December, cinema, helicopter, oxygen, photography, necessary, castle, vessel, bureau, entourage from French, hamburger, kindergarten from German, alphabet, apron, camel, map, napkin from Hebrew. Words like curry, dacoit, guru, shampoo from Hindi; origami, tycoon, judo from Japanese; and taekwondo, jackfruit, paddy from Korean. The list goes on to include balcony, candy, checkmate, chess, jackal, magic, rank, tiger from Persian, polonium from Polish. Words like: cobra, commando, mosquito, Negro, potato, tank from Portuguese; cosmonaut, intelligentsia, sputnik from Russian and betel, mango from Malay. Not only has English enriched itself by adopting words of other languages, other languages have also got enriched by adopting English words into them.

Just 50 years back in the days of Cold War English has adopted the word cosmonaut from Russian. This was not the case that the English failed to find a suitable



word in their own language. Use of the same words in different languages increases bonding of languages, nations and strengthens friendship. I remember my leftover Russian language knowledge came to enormous benefit while I was travelling through Czech Republic in 2004 and Bulgaria in 2009. While there are differences in these languages occasionally you get not only words but also sentences that carry similar meaning. People I spoke to did not consider me as a foreigner, rather their own only because I could utter some words and occasionally some sentences that carried the same meaning in different languages. However, unfortunately not too many words have been imported into English from Bangla. Although English people ruled over our land for around 200 years, not many Bangla words can be found in English vocabulary, although our language was so rich that the very first Nobel Prize for Asia came from our land through the works of poet Rabindranath Tagore in Bangla. In

Bangla, we have plenty of words used in judiciary that came from Persian and Arabic. Many business related words obviously came from the Portuguese. Portuguese invaders/and business people also brought different fruits like jackfruit and papaw.

It does not seem that inventing new words for science and technology in Bangla has paid dividend. We have taught more than one generation of young children the Bangla word for oxygen and hydrogen only to go back to these words in the next class by undoing their Bangali counterparts. If we want to devise Bangla words for software, hardware, email, system, World Wide Web, hard drive we can definitely find them. Say 'komol somvar' for software and 'kothin somvar' for hardware. Will it in any way help our kids grasp the concepts in a better way? It will simply cause retardation to the usual speed of understanding and work. And in this competitive world of market economy, there is hardly any probability of them succeeding

It is not a bad idea to accept those popular words as has been done by many languages all over the world. This will save our students from learning too many unknown words, and possibly students will be able to understand the concepts of science and technology more

Needless to say in the process we do not like to sacrifice the beauty of our language. However, in recent years aggression of mobile phones and foreign TV channels over our language can hardly be successfully fought by preaching superiority and knowledge of language. Once upon a time the most meritorious students of the country used to opt for science education. Now the world has become more science and technology based but that students are indifferent to science education cannot be justified by only weakness of science education. If a country is not production oriented and business activity is dominant then there is no need in production skill. Why should then a student go for science education? A good science student on his own or by the will of parents will get admitted into a subject that will give him/her assurance of a good job and good financial status.

We are falling short of having our TV channels broadcasting programmes that will be able to attract audience. In case we are able we are simply copying programmes of neighbouring countries that cannot give any sense of respect towards our ability or creativity. Our young generation is unfortunately failing to keep their confidence in us, stop watching foreign channels and be enlightened with patriotism by watching our own cultural programmes. In the long route buses, in functions of marriage and everywhere else we have only Hindi songs; at home, Hindi films are being enjoyed by young and old alike. Children are now feeling more comfortable with spoken Hindi. The country's language that got recognition as international mother tongue and the freedom won by heroic struggles of freedom fighters are both at stake. We must fight back from this state of indifference and proudly stand up among the League of Nations as a nation proud of its culture, language, literature, songs and heritage.

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