

Corrupt development begets corruption

WHEN TALLER BUILDINGS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN HIGHER EDUCATION



PHOTO: OLIUR SUN

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What would we learn sitting in an air-conditioned and well-furnished classroom if the pedagogical practice remains the same—copy-pasted slides from SlideShare with watermarks still on them, exhibiting incompetence and indolence? Which path of knowledge would we be treading on, with a fancy library reading MP3 BCS guides, while a thick layer of dust covers the library books, longing for human touch? With teachers being transmitters of knowledge and students only passive receivers in a high-tech environment, would we not be annulling curiosity and participation—two fundamental qualities of knowledge as observed by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire?

The masquerade of development

at Jahangirnagar University focusing exclusively on infrastructure, while academia is in exponential decay, is testament to the ineffectiveness of the development discourse. Without addressing the current pedagogical concerns, academic policies, and practices, the whole discussion of the university's development merely performs an ideological function—development as an ideology that legitimises the status quo. This legitimisation is transpired through the invocation of the developed and underdeveloped dichotomy, with those in power controlling and deciding what will be deemed as developed and what prescriptions of development the underdeveloped are to follow.

With the advent of post-development thinking, the grand narrative of development was construed to be entrenched in the idea(l)s of modernisation that universalise Western economic and social structures.

According to anthropologist Arturo Escobar, "Development was—and continues to be for the most part—a top-down, ethnocentric and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of 'progress'. Development was conceived not as a cultural process (culture was a residual variable to disappear with the advance of modernisation) but instead as a system of more or less universally applicable technical interventions intended to deliver some 'badly needed' goods to a 'target' population."

Once the "badly needed" classrooms and dorms were proposed to be delivered to the "underdeveloped" target—Jahangirnagar University—through the Tk 1,445 crore mega development project, the dark side of modern development was exposed. With the current state of socio-economic-political affairs in Bangladesh, development entails corruption, an anthropocentric model and repressive power matrix. Likewise, the JU mega development project lacked transparency from the very start, with instances of tender snatching, non-disclosure of plans, and rushed construction of infrastructure without addressing any of these irregularities. The blending of Western and Eastern architectural styles by Muzharul Islam which gave Jahangirnagar its iconic red buildings, and the spatial variation in accordance with the existing landscape have repeatedly been violated beyond correction. The new fraudulent master plan (which in reality is only an animation of the exterior of a few buildings) is far from that architectural vision which seeks to establish a harmony between nature and architecture.

al intervention.

The indiscriminate deforestation by JU authorities also initially triggered environmental concerns. It simultaneously exposed the fraudulent plan and corruption which later drew national attention after the removal of two top leaders of BCL, who demanded their "fair share" from the vice chancellor. With the turnout of events, the involvement of the vice chancellor and her family in bribing the JU BCL leaders also became apparent, though her husband and son's intervention in many administrative affairs of the university was already an open secret.

As questionable as the moral integrity of the vice chancellor is her integrity as an academic also remains dubious due to her lack of ownership in the academic cause while she pursues her political interests by constantly removing her opposition from administrative duties. The fixation with the infrastructural development of JU led by the vice chancellor also runs counter to the academic cause, which remains excluded from the scope of this development. Political appointment of teachers, research plagued by plagiarism, reproduction of colonial pedagogy, dormitories controlled by thugs of the ruling party, ragging culture, numerous academic, and administrative irregularities—all seem to lose against the grand discourse of development. As a result, the authorities are exempt from their responsibility to address the existing and ever-increasing decay of the academic environment.

In order to fight this discursive developmental regime and reclaim the academia only to revolutionise it with an educational system that does not "develop" but liberate us from the existing oppressive systems, we must resist the systems. And systems are run, controlled, and maintained by people who benefit from them while subjecting others to oppression vis-à-vis corruption. Therefore, resistance to the oppressive systems that corrupt demands resistance to people who generate oppression.

Jahangirnagar, in its fight against corruption, is therefore fighting against those who corrupt—those who let the corrupt systems rule in the name of development and mega projects, with slogans and songs as their only weapon:

"We sing because it rains in the gutter
and we are militants of life
and because we cannot
and we will not
let the song become ashes"

-Mario Benedetti

Oliur Sun is a non-philosopher.



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