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What institutional pride conceals

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Institutional pride is an attitude seen among the students and alumni of educational institutions which are generally considered “elite” and have demand in the eyes of concerned parents and ambitious students. It’s hard to pinpoint where the love for one’s alma mater ends and where the toxic attitude of institutional pride begins. Nevertheless, this attitude represents one of the glaring problems in the education system of Bangladesh – the inequality in access to quality education.

Despite being one of the most important growth factors in today’s world, education has always taken a backseat in Bangladesh. Yes, the general public is aware of the value of education and the number of school-going children has increased in recent decades. However, at the same time, the quality of education has been a subject of controversy, drawing criticism from various intellectuals who have been working with the education system and policy. However, the opinions of these intellectuals and educationalists aren’t considered when the government fixes its yearly budget, as can be seen through the lacklustre budget for the educational sector for all recent fiscal years.

Despite the financial limitations, certain institutions deliver a somewhat better education to their students than others. These institutions also have a great history to boast about; many are from the British period. The alumni of these institutions have been successful in Bangladesh and abroad, and their successes are held to be a testament to the successes of the institutions themselves. Usually, there is tough competition to get into these institutions. For reasons just discussed, they are treated as elite and superior by both parents and students. All these factors lead to a toxic attitude amongst students who study at these places. Known colloquially as “institutional pride”, this attitude is an almost borderline superiority complex for being able to study at these institutions. In many cases, the teachers

of these institutions also perpetuate this pride for various reasons.

Love and appreciation for one’s institution aren’t new or harmful. One’s school or college can and should play an important role in shaping them. The schools, colleges, and universities which are most notorious for having students with this institutional pride are generally good. They provide better education and co-curricular activities. The students of these places tend to do better academically because of these opportunities. Appreciating these practices isn’t wrong or unethical; they are indeed praiseworthy. The issues begin when the students don’t realise that the facilities they experience are a privilege in a country like Bangladesh, and they end up displaying an obnoxious level of pride only because they study at that institution, which sometimes leads to demeaning other institutions.

Many institutions don’t have an adequate number of teachers, let alone qualified ones. An institution’s performance might be hampered due to involvement with local politics. The students at many places might not get a chance to participate in co-curricular activities, like different Olympiads, where they can shine. These aren’t individual faults of anyone, but a systemic failure, where the education system has not been able to provide quality education to everyone, irrespective of their class or social status. These shortcomings have to be discussed and addressed. In this environment, displaying empty institutional pride doesn’t benefit anyone and only helps strengthen the system that reinforces these inequalities.

These inequalities should also be addressed to reduce the unhealthy competition during the admission season. Most of the institutions in Bangladesh don’t have a system through which the full potential of the student can be assessed during admission. In many cases, the background of parents is also considered or the parents might have to take a viva exam during the admission process, which might be a barrier for many

students coming from underprivileged backgrounds. The lottery system for admission is also a dire problem that results in many deserving students facing exclusion from educational opportunities they would otherwise have qualified for.

These discrepancies must be addressed, and better admission criteria and considerations must be introduced. However, reform cannot stop at the admission phase. It’s also crucial to ensure that a child can get a quality education in whichever institution they get admitted to. Similarly, universities across the nation should be developed and bettered. The reason parents and students are anxious about getting into one or two particular universities (whether general, medical, or engineering) is because of the better facilities they provide. This leads to ugly competition in many cases. Reducing the inequality in education quality would, at least to some degree, ensure parents and students that they won’t fall behind others even if they don’t gain admission to those top few institutes.

This isn’t to morally condemn the students who have institutional pride. It is to remind them of their privilege in the current education system of Bangladesh. It is to make them understand that superiority complex due to studying at a particular institution and demeaning others because of it isn’t conducive to anything; it is only a sign of disrespect and unawareness towards the unequal access to education across the country.

Yes, even after all our efforts, every institution probably won’t be equal. It might not be possible to separate one’s access to education from their socio-economic reality. Still, by making proper policies and allocations, it is possible to take a step towards that direction. Everyone deserves to be proud of their institution, not just a select few.

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