Private University Education in Bangladesh
Chapter III

PRIVATE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

The economy of Bangladesh is growing steadily. Its future is largely dependent on the quality of its human resources. There is no alternative of education for making quality human resources. Different types of education, such as primary, secondary, and higher education, exist in Bangladesh. The traditional higher education has failed finding to its position in the colonial structure of the society and its failure to link with the post-independence society. Serious thought was given by the intellectual group of the country to overcome the hurdles of traditional higher education and finally, higher education in the private sector has been unlocked.

Situation of Education in Post-liberation Bangladesh

Bangladesh was liberated in 1971. After the liberation of Bangladesh, more than 95% of schools and colleges were established and maintained by the private initiatives. At that time, the Government took an initiative to bring under state payroll and maintenance over a hundred thousand teachers and their institutions. This initiative was taken as a patriotic feelings without defining a policy or waiting for the recommendations of the newly set-up national commission on education headed by Dr. Kudrat-i-Khuda. It was clear that the initiative was viewed as a response to local pressure for buying political support. By the end of 1982, it was found that the Government provided salary support to 305,000 teachers of non-government schools. A large group of teachers were recruited to fill in the deep vacuum created by the mass departure of Hindu teachers following the partition of India in 1947 on communal lines. But the majority of them were very poorly qualified to teach students (Haq, 1997:18).

By 1983, the Government raised salary support up to 70% for non-government teachers. Whenever the government moves to increase its education budget in national budgetary allocations for the non-government sector, most of the times it was observed that a large portion of the budget was eaten up by its salary. To increase the teachers’ payroll, the Government has been under constant pressure although the nation continues to carry the burden of as high illiteracy as nearly 75% even after 25 years of independence. At all levels, education has not only become hollow and costly, it has also become insufficient for preparing the future generations (Haq, 1997:18-19).
In Bangladesh politics, the role of education is a serious delusion in the attempt to understand the deep crisis in education, which is disturbing the social and economic progress of the nation. Everyone would agree the crucial political role played by the students in the language movement, the war of liberation and in the restoration of democracy but that is not at all an academic role. It is perhaps an inactive outcome of a dysfunctional educational experience. There are a few students, if any, enter higher educational institutions for politics, which most of them appear to leave it as soon as they find alternative paying jobs. Sometimes students take time in politics to improve their future employment prospect. This is true that there are not enough political jobs in the country. In the job scenario, 80% of university graduates take more than two years to secure their first jobs, most of which are unrelated to their fields of academic specialization (Haq, 1997:19).

**Politics and Students’ Role in Higher Education**

“The prospects of private higher education in Bangladesh is inherited an educational structure hollowed of qualified human resources. Those who progressively filled the vacuum, either as teachers or students, were torn between focusing on the search for knowledge or becoming instant politicians – conflicting values inherited from their association with the freedom movement till 1947 and the Bengali independence movement since 1971. During the 1950s and ’60s, the higher education base was limited to a few pre-Pakistan period premier colleges and Dhaka University, and from the late ’50s, Rajshahi University. The tradition of searching for knowledge dominated the community of scholars. They prided on their past collaboration with scientists and academicians belonging to top British and American universities. But while the universities in the West moved ahead in knowledge building and technological development, Bangladeshi academics remained mired in the presumed glory of the past. Students who involved themselves with politics during this period were primarily motivated by concerns of ideology or issues of national and cultural identity. A number of first class students who went on to earn distinctions in later life were active in student politics (of the time)” (Sobhan, 2000).

After independence, a serious crisis appeared in Bangladesh politics. A large number of students were dragged into the firestorm, which often marked by bloody turmoil. Every political party had the funds to maintain a student cadre mainly to act as campaign workers. The students were used to make agitation and forced to bear any violent consequences. Hard cash was used to buy their loyalty, and many residential halls have been turned into virtual weapon stores and centres of operation for non-student musclemen. The cash money and arms opened routes to drugs, women, and big money. Law and order was run under political patronage. A qualitative difference was found in the students’ participation in politics in pre- and post-independence Bangladesh. Those who are more conscious
and relatively better students on ideological grounds, they actively participated in students politics in pre-independence. Students’ participation in the politics in the post-independence is indiscriminate and chaotic. As a result, frustration and anarchic atmosphere in education were visible. Thus, the quality of education deteriorated, and growth of the national economy fell down, so employment market could not expand for the young people. A few jobs were created which required graduate or professional level competence. On the other hand, the present higher education is unable to provide competence for graduates to be self-employed or entrepreneurial or to work in new fields which they themselves might develop (Haq, 1997:19).

On campus politics and the Government’s reaction from outside make many groups among students who do politics, increase inter-group disagreement, and decompose in academic discipline. The dire consequences are the delay for successful completion of studies. This is described as sessions jam (i.e. overcrowding of sessions within the same academic year). The burden of those consequences falls on students whose graduation is often delayed up to three years and also upon their guardians who have to maintain them through the extended period. Since there is no extra-curricular programme on the campus for this extended period, the students might become tempting to involve themselves in self-destructive or anti-social activities. No nation can make its own grave for destroying its own potential human resources (Haq, 1997:20).

Another unavoidable outcome is the failure rates. Bangladesh is one of the developing countries where it has the lowest enrollment rates at higher education of the corresponding (18 to 23 years) age-group. This rate for developed countries is over 30, and in the United States over 50. Question raises about the cost of higher education. The average public cost per university student is about Tk. 25,700 per year. There is no estimate of private costs borne by the guardians. Better-off families transfer a sizeable amount of own funds from personal account to relative’s account abroad for educating their children. The politics of education sees ignoring the state cost of education that perhaps the highest per-capita investment has in the private higher education sector in the country. Very low success rates at the college level and unemployment of graduates indicate that a huge wastage of public fund as 80% of the emoluments of all college personnel are borne by the state and that most institutions also enjoy government development grants. Simultaneously, there is a huge loss of private wealth (Haq, 1997:20-1).

**A New Look in Higher Education**

According to Haq (1997:24), teaching, research, and application of knowledge and skills are considered the most important functions of the University for the greater Interest of society. Since the research and application of knowledge work together, these make higher education both international
and adaptive. At least for hundred years it has been shown in Europe and North America universities that they have a great capacity to become accustomed to advance development. Today, there is no doubt between what might be taught in higher education and in trade/vocational schools. There is a great demand on education to improve the skills in the employment to support modernization and to remove prejudices about vocational or technical education. There is also demand, at the same time, to increase cultural understanding for achieving a better quality of life. In the product sense, higher education is considered a ‘commodity’ which must meet and create its own demand.

Causes of Failure in Running Public Universities

Lacking of knowledge and basic education lead students to misuse their energy and express their frustration through conflict, factionalism, and campus violence. It has intensified students leaving university who are unable to perform their academic functions. This has also led to course overloading and session jams. The price of overloading and session jams is paid by students and their guardians who, of course, support their children through the extended period. Overcrowding of academic sessions resulting from undue delay in admission, unscheduled suspension of studies and examinations and severe shortage of teachers have been a chronic problem for many years. For that, a three-year honours course often takes 5-6 years to complete. Between 1980 and 1987, Dhaka University remained closed for four years and a half, the University of Engineering and Technology for about one year and four months, and the Rajshahi University for about eight months. It is not a matter of wonder that many students become troublemakers and easy recruits for political agitation.

Now the question is how to make bigger limited government resources available for the universities to take up an increased number of school graduates. Many of whom prove their ability to benefit from higher education. It is obviously true that the rising surge for higher education cannot be contained by 'tending the wounds and mending the fences' of the existing government universities. This supports strongly in favour of establishing private universities in Bangladesh. Usually, several hundred private universities in Japan take up over 90% of almost half a million candidates every year (Haq, 1997:24-5).

Often the campuses turn into battlefields with free play of modern firearms due to politically-engineered acts of violence. Sometimes it has claimed the lives of promising youths since liberation. Lack of discipline has become common obstruction for the learning process. Even the President of the country has made repeated requests to the political parties to dismantle their student wings for re-establishing academic peace and allow unobstructed academic atmosphere of learning. A small number of positive steps have, however, been taken to stop recurrence of such violence (Haq, 1997:26).
Inspiring Ideas on Private Initiatives

According to Khan (2007), educational development in different countries varies in accordance with the political background, culture, and religion of the people, and economic means and objectives. Greece was the first state in the world where education was institutionalized for its citizens. As early as the 5th century BC, the residents of Greece sent their sons to schools up to the age of 14 years and attained near total male literacy (Castle, 1989: 35). The purpose was political, to secure a republican form of government through an elitist community.

According to the Bangladesh Ministry of Education (1984), a good number of students are today involved in drugs, women, big money, and extortion. Those so involved may well set up a small number compared to the vast majority, who wish to enroll in colleges and universities for preparing their future. But on account of violence on the campus, classes are postponed, examinations are delayed for months and years, and there is a high rate of failure in examinations.

At present, existing political parties are not interested for any remedial action with regard to such involvement of students in politics. Although the President of the Republic repeatedly appealed to political parties to disband their student wings (Khan, 2007).

As stated by Khan (2007), during the Pakistan period, the bureaucrats ruled the country. No wonder that the brighter students preferred a career in the civil service, though in every successful batch there were some candidates in teaching profession prior to joining the superior civil service. The bureaucrats, they see themselves as superior to their political bosses; they even, sometimes, spoiled attempts at reforming their own service. So, the ethics of the bureaucrats became questionable, and many of them became politicized. Since they are holding the superior posts of high administrative authority, they are reluctant to collaborate and cooperate with civil society. After independence, the economy of the country was largely dependent on foreign assistance. This assistance was negotiated by government bureaucrats. This development assistance normally deals with a human resource development component. Two types of project are made -- one is small project and another one is big project. Opportunity for training remains in both the types of projects including building of institutions to undertake different and specialized training in the country. But none of these opportunities came for the Bangladesh universities. Public confidence in higher education has been reduced day by day due to the bureaucratic control of higher education and the unwillingness of political parties to disenfranchise their student wings. Senior bureaucrats, wealthy parents, and
politicians have silently stopped sending their children to public schools and universities in the country. Since the late 1980s, this class has progressively found that they educate their children in private English medium schools following the curricula of University of London or the University of Cambridge. Learning English is comparatively recent; there are only half-a-dozen secondary schools that offer a national curriculum in the English medium.

It has been observed that thousands of students at the post-secondary level leave the country every year under a diversity of different programmes. Postgraduate study in abroad is nothing new but undergraduate study in abroad is completely a new phenomenon in the country. Most undergraduate students are admitted to India and then the USA. The investments are justified against the prospects of future employment and migration. Considering these facts, any individual might think that the elite and upper-middle classes have practically privatized education for their own needs. Many businessmen still would like to invest their money in the private education sector, although the Government has also been increasing its education budget every year (Khan, 2007).

Despite all the problems mentioned above, Bangladesh has realized a lot in its self-governing development and in the fields of social and economic growth. The country’s key development plan is to ensure wellbeing of human resources. To attain overall economic development, the Government of Bangladesh is continuing its endeavor to improve the living standard of the poor. For that purpose, the Government is implementing a three-year plan titled ‘National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction’ (NSAPR). Education, training, and social development activities are the main areas of human resources development. The Government is giving more emphasis on social sector investment, particularly on education and health sectors as these are the basis of human development. The Government is giving education sector top most priority, as this area has been receiving the highest budgetary allocation for the last couple of years (BMoF, 2007: 153).

Several non-governmental organizations came forward to provide a back-up with the Government in developing and expanding the education programme in the country. BRAC is one of them, which plays an important role to educate poor, rural students, particularly girls who have either dropped out or left out of the formal education system. BRAC’s Non-formal Primary Education (NFPE) programme is currently known as BRAC Education Programme (BEP). BEP started its programme as a part of the Rural Development Programme of BRAC in 1985 with 22 one-room schools. By 2006, the number grew more than 52,000 units across the country, which included primary and pre-primary schools with an enrollment of over 1.5 million disadvantaged children, of whom 65% were girls (BRAC, 2007: 22).
Both Sargent Report in 1944 and first Bangladesh Commission Report in 1975 had recommended that the administrative costs should not exceed 5% of programme costs. At present, the public and private (for profit) sectors are active in secondary education whereas higher education is being forced into generating profits for continued existence. On the other hand, the role of the private sector in both secondary and higher education sectors is a sensitive political issue in South Asian countries. Those who ideologically favour central planning and public intervention in institutional development are incompetent about measures to encourage entrepreneurship in education, whether for profit or for non-profit.

Bangladesh is burdened with a large population density 32 times that of the United States. It faces a great task of developing its human resources. A renowned economist, with decades of experience in economic planning, recently remarked that ‘more than capital and natural resources, knowledge has emerged as the most important factor of production’ (Islam, 1999). Possibly, the only option is to develop a partnership with civil society and encourage non-profit investment in educational development of the country. Education in the subcontinent had been private and charitable. Due to poverty and bad management, the country led to the nationalization of education. But it is fact that at least a part of secondary education is private. Lot of students is currently studying in India and the West. A huge amount of private money is spent behind the private education (Khan, 2007).

As it is stated in the website of Bangladesh, education system which assumed that the Government was tempted to consider two things for establishing private universities in the country: one is politics and the other one is expenditure of foreign currency. The inspiration and motivation for establishing private universities came from the severe deterioration of education in the University of Dhaka. In 1993, over 80,000 Bangladeshi students were in Indian colleges, sent there by their parents for getting better education. The total tuition cost for the entire four years is approximately US$ 10,000 in the best private universities in India. This is exorbitant compared to the cost of tuition at public universities. The growth of private universities shows that they clearly met a hidden need.

The private university concept is new in Bangladesh, and it provides also a new avenue for higher education. After the establishment of Buckingham University as the first private university in the United Kingdom, most public universities expanded their sources of revenue, incorporating finances from business and manufacturing industry, and thus achieved a great development. The pioneer universities were the comparatively lesser-known or earlier technical schools that were raised to university status in the 1960s. The list now includes Oxford.

In Bangladesh, the amount that has been earned by public universities in their revenue budget is very minimal, i.e. only 5-12% of own income of public universities add to the total revenue budget of the
respective university. These earnings needed to be increased. Public universities can increase their earnings by utilizing their own and academic resources. In this regard, several reminders have been given to public universities by the Government and the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC), although it has been informed by the universities that it is not possible to implement or increase earnings of public universities without having any policy-level decision of the Government (University Grants Commission, 2006: 28).

It has been observed by Khan (2007) that schools and colleges are profitable enterprises in Bangladesh. But in the case of a university, the collection of tuition fees may not meet even half of the annual budget requirements. Students find it difficult to pay the full cost of higher education. Therefore, expenditure on the university must be considered an investment for the future growth of society, and the fiscal burden shared by the whole community. Both private sponsors and the Government need to be fully aware of the economics of higher education and its impact on total community development. The Government encourages the creation of funds and foundations by granting differential tax relief and concessions. The Government expects promotion of national projects, such as science education, library development, and advances in communication technology. Fortunately, the environment for all these is improving.

According to Hye (2006), now-a-days there are two categories of universities in Bangladesh: one is public and another one is private. The previous ones are few in number and have been established by the Government. These public universities are highly subsidized where students pay a nominal fee and the bulk of the fund needed is provided by the Government. All public universities are autonomous and conduct their affairs under Acts enacted for each university. The Bangladesh University Grants Commission supervises their activities and channels funds for revenue and development expenditure. The UGC plays an important role of a watchdog, ensuring that the autonomy granted to universities is properly used. They also oversee the rules and regulations regarding appointments, promotions of teachers, admission of students, holding of examinations, and conferment of degrees. The UGC has also regulatory and monitoring authority over private universities ensuring that the standard of teaching, libraries, laboratories, and physical facilities is satisfactory.

Demand for Private Education at the Tertiary Level

According to Islam (2006), there was a long-felt demand of the people for opening of private universities in the country. Private universities perform an important role in the growth of education, research, and scholarship along with public universities in developed countries. In our country, the private universities supplement the total education system. Establishment of private universities came from the limitations and inadequacies of our public education system, which were considered
fundamental requirements. Eight public universities located at Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Mymensingh were the main centres of higher education where hundred thousands of our students appeared for getting enrollment into different departments of these universities. The competition was always very intense, and many students could not get chance in the merit-based admission test. Even today, this competition for placements has not yet reduced in its intensity. One basic reason is that these students can engage themselves in higher studies at these public universities with very nominal tuition fees and get better academic and teaching facilities. The majority of talented students of the country would like to get admitted to study there. However, these public universities can accommodate only 25% of our students. So, the need was felt undoubtedly to create opportunities for higher education for the rest of the majority who want to continue higher studies in some institutions other than public universities.

When the Private Universities Act of 1992 was passed in the Parliament, many educationists, intellectuals, and guardians welcome it as an expansion of our education system at the private level. It created opportunities for many students at the tertiary level, and at the same time it could function to complement the long-established public education system in the country (Islam, 2006).

As it asserted in the website of Bangladesh education system, higher education in public universities is almost free in Bangladesh. On the other hand, higher education at private level is expensive. Until the early 1990s, university education was provided only by public universities (including the highly specialized medical colleges, engineering universities, and polytechnic institutes and colleges). Nowadays, vocational secondary schools, training centres, and on-the-job training opportunities in the private sector are jumping up to serve the labour market. The fast growing population, urbanization, and income have created a vast demand for good schools at all levels. Usually, parents believe that a good education is the ticket to social and economic success. The need for private tutors is also high. Weak governance has created many opportunities for fraud at all levels in the education sector.

Today, there are 54 private universities of varying quality operating under the Private Universities Act of 1992. The Act requires that at least 5% of the student body receive full tuition waivers. This is made to help poor students by taking advantage of these institutions. (University Grants Commission, 2006: 82).

It is also stated in the website of Bangladesh education system that additional choice of a private university by students from rich families assists to create vacancies in the public universities for other students. Advocates of private universities have argued that an expansion of private universities would improve access to tertiary education for all students. It appears after 16 years that, although
private universities have enhanced choice in higher education for many students, the overall impact on equity and access is mixed.

The better private universities have research centres, modern fully-networked computing facilities, computer-based libraries, well-equipped laboratories, and air-conditioned classrooms. The full-time faculty and administrators are assisted by a large group of visiting faculty who come on vacation leave from universities all over the world. The private universities have a strong bias towards the U.S. higher education system in respect of curriculum, books, and faculty training.

(Can be viewed at http://www.bookrags.com/Education_in_Bangladesh)
Visited on 07 January 2007

According to the Wikipedia, a private university is a university that is run with the individual entity. Private universities are common in Japan, the United States, the Philippines, presently in Bangladesh, and many other nations. There is no existance of private universities in some countries. The first public university in the country was established in Dhaka in 1921, then the eastern part of the province of Bengal in British India. Many other universities were established in Rajshahi, and Chittagong during the Pakistani period (1947-1971). After independence, other universities were also set up.

The UGC serves as the regulatory body of all the public (government-funded) and private universities of Bangladesh. The Private University Act of 1992 paved the way for vigorous sprouting of private universities. Still the country does not have any research and education network (REN).

**Benefits of Private Universities**

Since the inception of privatization of higher education, it has been assembling force and assumes three possible forms, which are mentioned below (Habib, 2006:8):

1. Increasing dependence on private rather than public resources;
2. Increasing collaboration and mutual understanding with private industry;
3. Enhancing competition among private institutions of higher education in respect to ranking, size, shape, physical facilities, computer labs, science labs, prestige or influence, IT facilities, most importantly library, etc.

Khan (2007) said that it is better to set up private universities in Bangladesh as an alternative strategy of higher education. A well-managed private university can provide many options of forging global
linkages, both for students and institutions, and impart the highest quality education at home. Besides, this can do the following:

a. To share the responsibility with the Government for providing education with a diversified programme that suits market needs;
b. To share the sector cost by generating new resources through non-profit private funding;
c. To save foreign currency;
d. To be more accommodating in designing curricula and syllabi to suit the job market in the country and abroad;
e. To keep away from political turmoil;
f. To provide a channel for the return of expatriate scholars; and
g. To catalyze reforms in public universities.

It is true that the private universities cannot flourish without basic cultural reorientation and the development of a clear understanding among the leadership. The key management of the private university has to understand the differences between a secondary school and a university. The main difference between the two is that while the secondary schools engage in teaching youths for socialization, and on the other hand, the university emphasizes on knowledge building through research and innovation.

**Total List of Universities in Bangladesh**

**List of Public Universities in Bangladesh**

List of Private Universities in Bangladesh

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