

CHAPTER II

## CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum is a dynamic component of the complex phenomenon of education which itself keeps changing in response to the needs and values of life in any society. Thus a full understanding of the curriculum can never be achieved by analysing it in isolation from the changing historical context of education. The current practices reflected in any curriculum should invariably be seen as moulded through past events and experiences. It is quite evident that the curriculum for primary education in Bangladesh in its present form did not emerge in a day. It took its present shape with respect to contexts, practices, structure, organisation and quality through a long process of evolution. A number of past events and factors have had their direct or indirect influences on the growth and development of primary school curriculum in Bangladesh. Therefore, if the researcher is earnest about studying the present curriculum of Bangladesh, he can not neglect the sphere of earlier thoughts and influences from which the curriculum has developed into its present form.

Keeping the above consideration in view, a brief historical account of curriculum innovations in Bangladesh

with particular reference to primary education has been presented in the following paragraphs of this chapter. An attempt has also been made, wherever found relevant, to highlight the socio-political factors which influenced the primary education curriculum in the respective periods.

## 2. THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

The area constituting the country of Bangladesh was, in ancient time, a part of India up to 1757 and, after the British embarkation, it was a part of British India till 1947. With the termination of the British rule in August 1947, it constituted the eastern wing of Pakistan and came to be known as East Pakistan. It remained in Pakistan till 1971 when Bangladesh as an independent country came into existence. Education in Bangladesh, in fact, has had a long history having come under the rule and influence of different political systems and religious groups. Education in Bangladesh in the ancient times was perhaps completely moulded in the traditions of Hindu scholarship. This was followed by, although for a relatively brief period, the Buddhistic influence. It is, however, the Muslim tradition which entered the scene in the medieval period, that has left a lasting impression on the educational scene of the country. Yet, despite this long history of educational efforts, a formal system of education streamlined in terms of its content, structure and operation made its beginning only

during the British period. In fact, the credit for sowing the first seeds of primary education in Bangladesh should unreservedly go to the efforts of the Christian Missionaries who came along with the British tradesmen.

When the East India Company embarked on its political career in 1757, there was no formal system of education organised or supported by the state in Bengal. A very small section of people used to learn merely for their individual interest. This learning situation was also created by the landlords or Zamindars for maintaining the status quo. This opportunity was also utilised by people aspiring to get royal favour. Thus education was very much limited to the children of the elite class and those who were associated with them. Apart from the fact that education was limited to a particular group of children, there was no organised structure, no printing of books, and no fixed time table. The principal objectives of instruction were to learn, to read and write, to compose a letter or execute a document according to set forms and to keep Zamindari or commercial account. It is seen that the complete authority of education was vested in the feudal class. This was the class which enjoyed the culture and could cultivate the intellect. The rest lived in squalor and ignorance. But the development of science and technology in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seriously disturbed the time-honoured social system and pattern of thinking. The wave of this modern thinking touched the soil of India although belatedly.

The contribution of missionaries to primary education began, when by the end of 1800, William Carey and his associates established schools in Bengal with a view to popularising education among the general people (Basak, 1974). This school differed materially from the traditional indigenous and non-indigenous schools in Bengal. It was made free; the vernacular was the medium; and it was devoid of denominational teaching although English was taught as a language. The success of their efforts hit the traditional conception of the Zamindar as well as the authorities of the East India Company, as it created greater awareness among the people and, in turn, made it difficult to exploit the masses. Thus the missionaries were discouraged from spreading mass education with modern thought. They were directed to confine their activities of preaching and founding churches and discharging other spiritual duties leaving the responsibility of educating the masses to the Company as specified in the Charter Act of 1813. It is a fact that missionaries occupied an important place in the field of mass education, particularly education for the lower class of society in Bengal. However, whatever might have been the character of the missionary school in general, there is no doubt that they introduced a system of education in this country. They introduced a wider curriculum including subjects like grammar, history and geography. Besides, they were the first to write and print school text-books. It was Carey who rendered a great service to the cause of mass education in Bengal by bringing out Bengali printed books. They also introduced regular school hours; their

schools were closed on Sundays. A clear cut class system with more than one teacher in many schools was introduced by them.

### 3. DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM DURING THE BRITISH PERIOD

The British rulers for the first time gave serious thought to the education of the natives through the appointment of the General Committee of Public Instruction in 1823. But a great controversy was already going on between the Anglicist and the Orientalist over the nature of the policy which was to be introduced in India. At last the decision was made in favour of Western education in 1835. It was a fact that Western education was needed to revitalize the country's educational system, but the policy followed in this regard was based not on the need or the interest of the general people but geared to win over the confidence of the upper class people of society who had lost their political influence due to the British conquest. The main intention of the policy is evident in the following words of Macaulay, "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the million whom we govern - a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Sharp, 1920). With the introduction of this policy by the name of Western education on an official level the objective of modern primary education, that is, 'education for all' remained unfulfilled.

It was admitted that "ever since the cold breath of Macaulay's rhetoric passed over the Indian languages and Indian textbooks, the primary education of the people in their own tongue has shrivelled and pined (Nurullah and Naik, 1951). Macaulay, however, claimed, "We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother tongue" (Sharp, 1920).

It is true that attempts were made to create a new system of education between 1854 and 1882. In 1854, Wood's despatch suggested that attempts should be made to use and improve the indigenous system for imparting correct Primary education to the great mass of the people in India, but without much result. In Bengal, the Circle School System was introduced for this purpose. It was later replaced by the Normal School System. Then came the Payment-by-result System. All these were intended to improve primary education as popular education within the existing policy of the Government. In spite of all these efforts, primary education did not make much progress because it was based on such ill-fated policies as 'introduction of English education' and the policy of 'downward filtration' in education. As a result, the progress of primary education was considerably checked and it is a fact of history that the percentage of literacy among men or the enrollment in primary schools, was on the whole no better in the late nineteenth century than it was at the opening of the nineteenth

century (Huq, 1954). If we consider the increase in the population of the country during that period, then it must show that the total number of school-age children outside the school increased too, while secondary and higher education made very rapid progress. This was a disquieting sociological phenomenon which called for enquiry, and in 1882 the first Indian Education Commission, known as Hunter Commission enquired into the problems of education in India. The Commission found the following curriculum being adopted in the Primary Schools of Bengal.

"Syllabus of lower primary standard, where pupils usually passed at the end of 3rd year.

1. Reading
  - (a) A vernacular adaptation of Chamber's Rudiment of knowledge.
  - (b) Manuscript written in current Hand.
2. Copy-Writing
3. Arithmetic
  - (a) The first four rules, simple and compound.
  - (b) Mental Arithmetic on the native method.
  - (c) Bazar and Zamindari accounts and simple mensuration.
4. Cunningham's Sanitary Primer" (Naik, 1964).

It is evident that the curriculum followed for the children of classes I to III was very much uninteresting. The emphasis was mostly on Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Not only that the adaptation of Chamber's Rudiment of Knowledge in the vernacular did not bear any meaning to the

children, but also it was neither desirable nor practicable for introducing mass education. Manuscript writing was also a sort of mechanical work and copy-writing too. Some may advocate that manuscript and copy writing may develop the psychomotor <sup>ability</sup> ~~aspect~~ of children. It may be observed that instead of copy writing, drawing can <sup>better</sup> develop that aspect. In case of Arithmetic, the first four rules, simple and compound was a good innovation along with mental arithmetic on the native method. But Bazar and Zamindari account was not needed as a part of general education of the masses. Thus, it can be seen that the curriculum was dissociated from life and activity. No wonder if children found very little attraction for it. It can be visualised that this sort of curriculum was envisaged to make some children as copy-writers in the court and offices and accountants of the Zamindar.

Further, the syllabus (Naik, 1964) followed in the upper primary classes, where the pupils usually passed at the end of a 5 Year course was as follows:

1. Vernacular language,
2. Arithmetic
  - (a) Vulgar and Decimal Fraction and Simple proportion;
  - (b) Native accounts.
3. Euclid, Book-I,
4. History and Geography of Bengal,
5. Elements of Physics,
6. Cunningham Sanitary Primer.

We can observe that there was a specific hierarchy in the introduction of different subjects in the syllabus. The syllabus of the upper primary was on the same lines as that of lower primary but it was bookish. There was no place for practical work in the syllabus, no scope for integrated approach there. Thus, it created an atmosphere of unreality in the minds of the pupils. Therefore, they could hardly be blamed if there were premature withdrawals and disinclination on their part to continue such school life. It can be said that the curriculum which was practised in the primary schools in Bengal was suited to the need and desire of the ruling class instead of making it popular among the general mass and also <sup>it was</sup> not suited to the needs of the child.

Enquiring into the curriculum, the Hunter Commission (Basu, 1945) had on the one hand recommended a simplification of the primary school syllabus and on the other, suggested its enrichment by inclusion of subjects of practical use e.g., agriculture, hygiene, sanitation, elementary science and drawing. Simplification tended to restrict the elementary school programme to the 3 R's only and thus resulted in a closer approximation to the practice of the indigenous elementary school. And thus it became easier to get the indigenous school to conform to the departmental system. Therefore, the recommendation of the commission could be seen as a concession to the resilience of Indian society in <sup>the</sup> fact of a

new culture and centralized state and economy set up by the British. It was also, in a way, a concession to the movement of modernisation following the industrial society of the west as it provided scope for evolving a richer school curricula based on practical reason as well as a broader appreciation of the nature of the child and his needs.

The major outcome of the Commission's recommendations was that it successfully defused the confrontation between the protagonist of traditional education imparted through the indigenous schools and of modern education that had come to be associated with schools supported by the British.

This situation was changed through the framing of a policy for Primary Education by Lord Curzon in 1901. This era opened with a better future for mass education and social development. It happened mainly due to a general awakening among the people towards national education which was inspired by the political philosophy of the then national leaders. This was followed by the introduction of a bill in 1911 by Gopala Krishna Gokhale for Compulsory Primary Education. Although the bill was defeated, it brought new light to the general mass and created considerable pressure on Government to bring a change in Primary Education. The more remarkable outcome of the awakening was the Swadeshi Movement which finally gave birth to the National Council of Education. The National Council of Education drew up a Curriculum (Sarkar, 1973) for three-year Primary, seven-year

Secondary and four-year collegiate courses in Bengal in 1906. This Council, then, sought to establish National Schools. Such schools — schools dependent purely on indigenous (non-British) contributions and adopting the syllabuses evolved by the Council sprung up in large numbers in Dacca, Mymensing, Noakhali, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Sylhet, Bakhergonj, Pabna, Rangpur, Chittagong in East Bengal. Looking to the tremendous efforts made by the natives and movements organised by the leaders the British Government considered a revision of its policy. Hence, Curzon (Nurullah and Naik, 1951) began to emphasize the necessity of imparting a liberal education in primary schools which would go as much beyond the three R's as possible. He proclaimed that primary education was the instruction of the masses, through the vernacular, in such subjects as would best stimulate their intelligence and fit them for their positions in life. Reference has already been made to his decision to include agriculture as a subject of study in primary schools, particularly in those situated in rural areas. Further, suggestion was made that the teaching of object lessons should be included and physical exercise should be made universal. The most significant reform was the decision to introduce differential curricula at rural and urban schools making instruction integrally related to the social environment. This idea though fundamentally correct did not succeed at the operational level. The Quinquennial Review (Nurullah and Naik, 1951) of the progress

of education in India (1902-7) revealed that Bengal provided the same curriculum and the same standards for both kinds of schools, with the sole difference that, in the scientific readers used in rural schools, the part relating to physics and chemistry were replaced by parts relating to agriculture.

The elementary course of this period covered four years in Bengal. The main objectives of elementary education were described by the Quinquennial Review (1897-1902) that the course of instruction in a primary school was simple and the maximum it attempted was to teach the child to read and write his own language; to obtain a sufficient knowledge of arithmetic and mensuration to enable him to do easy sums; and to understand the simple forms of native accounts and the village map; to acquire a rudimentary knowledge of geography, agriculture, sanitation and of the history of his country; to train his faculties by simple kindergarten and object lessons; and to develop his physique by drill and exercises (Naik, 1964).

The curriculum (Naik, 1964) followed in the Primary schools in Bengal for achieving the stated objectives was as follows:

**Compulsory:**

1. Kindergarten (Infant class)
2. Drawing
3. Object lesson

It is important to note that in East Bengal, lessons on agriculture and scientific subjects which appeared in reading books were to be illustrated by object lessons, but the curriculum made no other provision for object lessons.

4. Hygiene
5. Agriculture: Included in readers; elective, alternative to physics and chemistry
6. Science
7. Mensuration
8. Physical exercise.

Optional :

9. Manual work for older scholars.

It can be seen that the curriculum which was followed during this period was more modern and realistic than curriculum adopted in 1882. It was made practical and realistic by introducing subjects like drawing, physical exercise, agriculture, hygiene and science. The scope for life preparation was also there through the object lessons involving manual work. But it was a fact that the subject load had increased as compared to the earlier period, and there was no integrated approach in the organization of the curriculum. Thus, it remained bookish.

#### 4. DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION DURING DIARCHY AND PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY

The introduction of Constitutional Reforms by Lord Minto in 1919 which brought the country under Diarchy was undoubtedly

one of the most significant events in the political history of India. It changed the political set up and made great impact on various spheres of life, especially on the education of the people. Under diarchy the administration of education was put in independent charge of an Indian minister. Thus, for the first time after British embarkation, a department of education was brought under the control of a native representative. Another important event during Diarchy was the introduction of the Bengal Rural Primary Education Act, 1930, through which primary education was made free. The Act also created a central primary education committee to advise the Government on matters of primary education. In some places, initiative was taken to make primary education compulsory but, due to non-availability of funds, it was not implemented fully during the 1920s.

One of the greatest weaknesses of the primary education system during this period was the inappropriate curriculum. The general trend of curriculum revision during this period was to make it more complex and elaborate and to add subject after subject, over and above, the subjects that had already entered into the curriculum by 1902, School Gardening and Nature Study which were the two favoured subjects of this period, were introduced into the primary school curriculum of 1905-1922 in Bengal. In addition, further suggestion was made to introduce the teaching of English in the primary school curriculum. The curriculum which was not in accordance with the needs of the child and unrelated to the conditions

of the village life, resulted in a divorce between the interest of the school and the interest of the home, and in the stiffening of the belief among the rural population that little benefit is to be obtained from the sacrifice involved in sending their children to school.

Looking back at the status of primary education curriculum during Diarchy, one can specify two important points. The first observation is that there was a general expectation that the Indian representatives with the relatively greater freedom given to them would initiate major changes in the primary education curriculum. The expectation was just natural as the major criticism or allegation of the natives had been that the school curriculum was unrelated to the needs and aspirations of the natives and it was tailored to suit the requirements of continued colonial rule. However, surprisingly, the period ended without witnessing any major innovation in the primary education curriculum, while the local leaders and educationists indulged in unending debates regarding the nature of the ideal national system of education. A second point to be noted is that until the time of the constitutional Reforms of Lord Minto, education was completely secular in character. The Constitutional Reforms which provided freedom to the natives in deciding the board of the establishment of schools led to the demand for separate institutions for Hindus and Muslims, thereby legitimizing communal orientation in the education provided at government funded schools.

Granting of provincial autonomy undoubtedly marked a major success for the long-term battle for freedom in India that was to see its end within a period of ten year. It was hoped that with the introduction of provincial autonomy, education in general and primary education in particular would make rapid progress. In fact, like every other province Bengal prepared a programme for quantitative expansion as well as qualitative improvement of primary education. The provincial government made attempts to recognise and revitalize primary education through supply of trained teachers and by providing four years of primary education with a curriculum developed according to the Wardha Scheme of Basic Education. The curriculum evolved for the Basic Education represented the final acceptance of the experience bared education system pronounced by Mahatma Gandhi. In fact, the idea of basic education was a vigorous reaction to the bookish, non-realistic and traditional education in India. Basic education was also seen as answer to the charge that prohibitive amounts of finances would be required for introducing universal, compulsory primary education. But there was much criticism against the practice of this scheme of education among educationists and leaders. However, Gandhi's idea of basic education was in fact approved by the Zakir Husain Committee. This was later revised by the Kher Committee and was accepted by the Central Advisory Board of Education. The Curriculum for the seven year course of basic education (Srivastava, 1963) included:

- 1) the basic crafts like spinning and weaving, carpentry, agriculture, fruit and vegetable gardening, leather work or any other craft for which local and geographical conditions are favourable;
- 2) the mother tongue;
- 3) Mathematics;
- 4) Social Studies, including Geography, History and Civics,
- 5) General Science, including Nature Study, Botany, Zoology, Physiology, Hygiene, and Chemistry;
- 6) Drawing;
- 7) Music; and
- 8) Hindustani (in both Scripts).

It is also worthwhile to mention that while the basic education scheme was under experimentation, a wave of educational reconstruction seemed to pass over the country. Thus, this period was not one of actual achievement but one of preparation of plans for reconstruction of education for the future. The Wood and Abbott report was also submitted in this period for the improvement of vocational as well as general education in India. The National Planning Committee proposed primary education for children in line with the Wardha Scheme of Basic Education. However, the escalation of the second world war blocked the implementation of new policies and, consequently, the policy for implementation of Basic Education could be enacted only in 1944. The situation got further compounded as, in the meantime, the Sargent Committee also submitted its report to the British Government. Again any action based on

either the Basic Education Scheme or the Sargent Committee Report had to be shelved in view of the impending changes in the political set up. Thus, primary schools of Bengal continued to follow the curriculum which was in operation in the previous decades. This fact can be easily observed by perusing the outline given below specifying the curricular inputs provided during this period (Sen, 1933).

- Infant Class : Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Observation lesson, Drawing and Physical Drill.
- In class I : Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Hygiene, and Observation lesson for boys or Hygiene or Domestic Economy for girls, Physical Drill for boys or needle work for girls. Manual work for boys and Drawing for boys and girls.
- In class II : The same subjects as in class I; in addition, Geography was introduced.
- In class III and IV : Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Hygiene for boys or Hygiene or Domestic Economy for girls; Drill for boys and Needle work for girls; Nature study based on school gardening for rural schools; Manual work for boys; Mahajani Account, Drawing, and English.

It should be noted that under provincial autonomy, education came under the complete control and supervision of

the Indian representatives. However, the hope that they would usher in major innovations in education was totally belied partly due to their preoccupation with the movement for political freedom and partly due to major ideological differences among themselves. It was, of course, true that there were genuine difficulties in bringing about major qualitative changes in the existing system. Yet it cannot be denied that the failure to achieve a major breakthrough in evolving an Indian Education System has led to a situation where the people still have to bear the burden of the British legacy, even after achieving political independence. It is a matter of common knowledge that the educational system of the country has been unable to liberate itself fully from the shackles of this British legacy. As, even today, the education system bears the mark of British rule in a major way both in its structure and curriculum.

##### 5. REFORMS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM DURING THE PAKISTAN PERIOD.

With the achievement of Independence in August, 1947, East Bengal became a province of Pakistan and came to be called East-Pakistan. In fact, Pakistan itself was born to fulfil the vision of a national homeland for the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent. At the time of independence, the two wings of the country, namely East-Pakistan and West-Pakistan perhaps had more differences than similarities with

respect to various aspects such as, demographic structure, politico-historical background, geographical features as well as cultural and linguistic dimensions. The education system prevailing in the two wings also differed considerably in structure as well as in content. However, the Pakistan Government initially did not make any attempt to bring forced uniformity in the educational system adopted in the two wings. In fact, a separate committee known as the East Bengal Education System Reconstruction Committee was set up in 1949-50 to review and revise the system of education in East Bengal. The Committee did make wide-ranging recommendations to improve the educational system in general and primary education in particular. However, the recommendations remained unimplemented largely due to political and economic discriminatory attitudes adopted by the Government of Pakistan. The only concrete measure taken during the decade from 1947 to 1957 was the enactment of the East Bengal Primary Education Act as amended in 1952; Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act of 1930 as amended by the East Bengal Act XX of 1951 and the East Bengal Ordinance XVII of 1951 (Huq, 1954). These acts, in any case, did not introduce any major changes in the existing situation either in the organizational set up or in the quality of content of primary education. Rather, they gave rise to major controversies and differences of opinion among leaders and educationists, particularly in East Bengal. The revised curriculum (Govt. of East Pakistan, 1957) which was brought into operation in the primary schools of East Bengal during

1951-1952, had the following component subjects:

1. Mother tongue, reading and writing
2. Arithmetic
3. Social Studies (History, Geography, Civics)
4. Elements of Science
5. Urdu
6. Religious instruction
7. Physical Training and Music
8. Arts and Crafts.

As is evident from this list, the reforms brought into the curriculum two new subjects in a compulsory fashion. These were Religious Instruction and learning of Urdu language. But for this, the curriculum remained unchanged as compared to what was adopted prior to independence. Of the two new subjects introduced religious instruction was accepted by the majority as a welcome major change. It helped in inculcating Islamic ideology into the citizens. But the introduction of Urdu as a compulsory language from Standard IV was met with tremendous resistance from the people of East Bengal. It may be noted that the introduction of Urdu as the sole state language was being fought tooth and nail by the people of East Bengal. It is necessary to realise here that the language that is used by a particular society as an integral part of that society's total cultural pattern and behaviour. An individual, as a member of a society acquires his native language along with its culture in which he is brought up. Language is an expression of

culture as well as a vehicle for cultural transmission. It may also be observed that at the time when the Government of Pakistan tried to impose Urdu on the people of East Bengal, fifty-six percent of the population of Pakistan were living in East Bengal and had Bengali as their mothertongue. Seen in this context, it was quite natural that the people of East Bengal regarded this attempt to impose Urdu as an act of political and cultural exploitation. It is a fact of history that it required a bloody protest before Bengali was accorded the status of state language in 1956. Consequently, compulsion regarding the learning of Urdu at the school level was also withdrawn. Apart from these events another, important reform was introduced in 1954 essentially as a follow up of the recommendations of the East Bengal Education System Reconstruction Committee 1949-1950. This was to make primary school education to have course of five years from classes I to V instead of four years from classes I to IV.

Thus the decade following independence witnessed a situation wherein primary schools continued to remain ineffective and inefficient, reaching only a section of the population, while controversies were raised which in any case had little impact on the quality of instruction provided.

In order to reduce and eventually eliminate the drawbacks and weaknesses of the existing system of education in East-Pakistan, the Government of East-Pakistan formulated an Educational Reforms Commission in 1957. The Report of the

East Pakistan Educational Reforms Commission put forth the following view regarding primary education:

"The Primary stage is the base of the system of formal education and as such is the most important one. So, as things stand in East Pakistan to-day, planning of primary education must be essentially teacher-centred. The teacher has to be well-equipped to understand the child and his place in the community life. He should have the technical knowledge of the hows and whys of the child's growth and his education that is to be imparted with an eye to the interests and needs, not only of himself, but also of the society." (Govt. of East Pakistan, 1957).

The Education Reforms Commission had actually, chalked out the following system of Primary Education for East Pakistan. There was to be a uniform system of education for all types of children up to primary stage throughout East Pakistan. The curriculum for primary education was to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored. This curriculum and syllabus should be so designed that the child could adequately utilize his environment. Special attention should be paid to the teaching of the mother tongue and teaching should be done through the mother tongue of the child and no other language should be taught in the course of the primary stage of education i.e., no second language was to be taught during the first 5 years of a child's education in a primary school. The

Primary Curriculum (Govt. of East Pakistan, 1957) was to include syllabuses in the following subjects:

- i) Reading the mother tongue,
- ii) Writing the mother tongue,
- iii) Arithmetic,
- iv) Social Studies including History, Geography and elements of Civics, to be taught orally in Class II and partly orally and partly through simple books from class III upward,
- v) Elements of Science including Health Care, to be taught orally from Class I and partly orally and partly through books from class III upward,
- vi) Arts and Crafts entirely practical,
- vii) Physical Training, Games and Music Practical,
- viii) Religious Instruction - mainly oral and practical, the help of books being taken from class III upward.

It was recommended that the existing burden of books in the primary stage should be lessened after due care and consideration. Unsuitable and unnecessary materials need not go into textbooks at all. The number of books be reduced from 28 to about 15. Teacher's handbooks should be prepared and published by the director of education. The Commission also suggested appointment of a committee for making necessary changes in the curriculum and syllabus in the light of their recommendations, which was supposed to be introduced after 1960.



As can be noted, the Commission had come out with radical recommendations which had considerable potential to bring about crucial improvement in the primary school curriculum. However, again the reports had to remain on the book-shelves only as outcomes of an academic exercise rather than a policy measure. The military Government which came into power in 1958 brought in a blanket stay for the implementation of all new policies. In fact, education was made a central subject and all responsibilities of running educational institutions in Pakistan was taken over by the Central Ministry of Education. Under the changed circumstances yet another commission namely the National Commission on Education in Pakistan was formed in January, 1959. This Commission, after examining various dimension of primary education in the context of the findings of the previous Commissions as well as the currently prevalent practices in other parts of the world, specified the following objectives for Primary Education in Pakistan:

- (a) to provide such education as will develop all aspects of child's personality - moral, physical and mental;
- (b) to equip a child according to his abilities and aptitudes with the basic knowledge and skills he will require as an individual and as a citizen and which permit him to pursue further education with profit;
- (c) to awaken in a child a sense of citizenship and civic responsibilities as well as a feeling of love for his country and willingness to contribute to its development;

- (d) to lay the foundation of desirable attitudes in the child including habits of industry, personal integrity and curiosity;
- (e) to awaken in the child a liking for physical activity and an awareness of the role of sports and games in physical well being (Govt. of Pakistan, 1959).

It can be observed that the statement of objectives reflects a deep study of the needs and aspirations of the people of East Bengal and also the modern trends in primary education, prevalent at that time. In order to achieve these objectives the Commission thought it appropriate that a separate committee should be formed to arrive at an appropriate curriculum for the primary schools of Pakistan. Accordingly, a Curriculum and Syllabus Committee for Primary Education was constituted by the Central Ministry of Education in 1960. This Committee prepared a new curriculum broadly based on the objectives laid down by the National Education Commission and two other objectives specified by the UNESCO namely to develop international understanding and spirit of universal brotherhood, and to inculcate scientific attitude.

The Curriculum and Syllabus Committee arrived at a list of seven subjects to be introduced in the primary schools with a view to achieving the stated objectives. These were as follows:

1. Language :
  - (a) Mother-tongue - Urdu, Bengali, Sindhi and Pushto - any one,
  - (b) Non-Mother-tongue - Urdu,
  - (c) Foreign language - English (optional),
2. Elementary Mathematics,
3. General Science,
4. Social Studies (including History, Geography, Civics),
5. Physical Education (including Health),
6. Religious Education,
7. Arts including music and rhythmic movements, and Practical Arts including Free-hand drawing and Manual work (Govt. of Pakistan, 1960).

This curriculum was introduced in the primary schools of East Pakistan in 1961. As can be observed, the curriculum did not materially differ from what was prevalent in the previous decade. In fact, despite serious protests from the people of East-Pakistan, the Government of Pakistan made compulsory the study of another language, namely Urdu, which was obviously as much foreign to the children of East-Pakistan as English was. Thus, the outcome of the reforms was only to further the burden with the study of more literary subjects. The situation continued with little change till the day of liberation in 1971, when Bangladesh came into existence. In fact, it is pertinent to mention here that due to increasing pressure from the provincial government, the Central Government

was forced to reconsider its policy in 1968 and, partially redeem the situation by withdrawing the compulsory learning of Urdu. However, due to the historical mass movement in 1969 no public announcement or commitment was made by the Government of Pakistan about the revised educational policy.

It would be appropriate therefore, to conclude that primary education during the Pakistan period remained not only inadequate in terms of coverage but also suffered badly regarding qualitative <sup>improvement</sup> ~~important~~. It had a predominantly literary bias. As such, there was little provision for vocational training. As regards content, there was an over emphasis on the study of languages. So much time in a boy's life was spent on mastering a foreign language that often the main purpose of education was missed. In brief, it may be said that the Pakistan period contributed little to the overall improvement in primary education in East-Pakistan. Rather, it seriously damaged the interest of primary education by creating avoidable problems and controversies throughout the period.

#### 6. DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Since inception, the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has pledged to establish a new and egalitarian social order in consonance with the national ideology and state policy enshrined in its constitution. For this, the Government considered it imperative to reform

the existing education system, and accordingly a commission was appointed in 1972. The Commission was asked to examine thoroughly the existing system of education and recommend a suitable one for reorganizing and revitalizing the age-old system prevailing in the country. Meanwhile, a bold step of nationalization of primary education, was taken by the Government in 1973 along with the launching of the First Five Year Plan (1973-78) of Bangladesh. The Plan specially emphasised the removing of illiteracy from the country through introducing universal primary education. In 1974, the National Education Commission also submitted its report laying special emphasis on mass education, work and life-oriented education, integration of religious instruction with public education system, vocational, scientific and technical education for the country. It also extended the main objective by recognizing primary education as the basis for human resource development and as the fundamental point to start with for the development of the country.

Both the First Five Year Plan and the Report of the National Education Commission (Govt. of Bangladesh, 1974) in line with previous proclamations, emphasized the need for universal primary education. The Education Commission went one step further in its desire to make primary education compulsory up to class V by 1980 and up to class VIII by 1983. In order to achieve the objectives of primary education in Bangladesh, the commission recommended that appropriate and relevant curriculum should be introduced. It also recommended

that a National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee should be formed to prepare the syllabus and curricular material. The Commission also recommended that Bengali and Arithmetic will be taught in class I and II along with physical exercise, games, music and drawing. Three new subjects, namely, History, Geography and General Science may be added to courses for classes III to V. It was emphasized that in preparing the syllabuses for the primary classes, the agrobased economy should be taken into consideration. It was made clear that up to class V there will be no necessity of learning any language other than Bengali. All these recommendations of the Commission were accepted by the Government in principle.

In the meantime the democratic government got replaced by a military government which came into power in 1975 through a coup d'etat and acquired its legitimacy through subsequent practices of democracy. This civil-military government introduced perceptible changes in the national principle which was incorporated in the constitution by the first democratic government of Bangladesh. It is in this context that the National Curriculum and Syllabus Committee was formed in November, 1975. Thereafter, text books and other instructional materials were prepared in accordance with the recommendations of this Committee's report which was published in 1976. It is this set of material which is in use even now in the primary schools of Bangladesh.

It may also be mentioned that a National Education Advisory Council was formed under the chairmanship of the Education Minister of this Government in 1978 with a view to formulating an interim education Policy. The Report of this Committee was published in February, 1979. However, it is not known whether it was accepted by the Government.

Meanwhile, the Second Five Year Plan came into force. Aiming at the transformation of the vast human resources into productive forces, the Second Five Year Plan considered education and training to be crucial. For attaining 100 per cent literacy, the Plan put major emphasis on bringing all the school age population of 5 - 9 years to school. For this purpose the plan proposed:

- i. introduction of universal primary education with particular emphasis on the development of cognitive skills,
- ii. to make primary education compulsory for school age population of 5 - 9 years,
- iii. to provide instructional materials, books and other things free of cost,
- iv. to provide free uniforms and lunch to the student from landless families,
- v. to increase the enrolment to 91.47 per cent of 5 - 9 years age group population by the end of the plan period (Firdous, 1980).

In order to materialise the proposed views, the Plan suggested the following measures: The physical facilities should be extended to increase the number of children in the primary schools. Government grant will be made conditional on internal efficiency and qualitative improvement. There should be a dynamic change in the curriculum and syllabuses of primary education in the practical and work oriented direction so that on completion a student does not find himself or herself useless in social and productive field (Firdous, 1980).

Immediately after enactment of the Second Five Year Plan, the Government tried to hand over the management of primary education to the local body. But, in fact, it was not possible due to the pressure of the teachers in different corners. As a result, Government made an ordinance entitled: 'The Primary Education Ordinance, 1981' to provide for the better organization of primary education and efficient administration and management of the affairs of primary schools. After the introduction of the ordinance, the nature of the Government changed again into a civil military rule, because of the assassination of the President in 1981. Afterwards, a civil Government was formed through democracy within the structure of civil-military rule. But it was also an irony of fate that another military government came into power in 1982 by replacing the democratic government.

Soon after taking over the political control, the Military Government announced a National Education Policy and Programme (1982-1987). This proposed policy called for alteration, modification, revision and change in the curricula and syllabi for all stages. Under this policy of education, Arabic would be one of the compulsory subjects from the very first standard, i.e. from class I. It claimed that this has been done, keeping the religious and cultural aspects of life of the people and the international needs of the people of the country in view. Provisions are also there in it to teach Sanskrit and Pali for other non-muslim children. The introduction of English as a compulsory subject from class II at the primary level is another significant step that has been suggested with a view to facilitating access to higher education and international communication.

However, the above proposed education policy still remains under consideration. Educationists, spokesmen of different political organizations and elite of the country have expressed their views and arguments candidly in both the directions, favourable and unfavourable to the policy. Therefore, one has to wait and see the shape of the curriculum for primary education of the country as it is going to emerge in the coming years.

Making a categorical judgement as to the progress of primary education in Bangladesh is not only a difficult proposition but also not a desirable one. The nation still has

to arrive at a national policy in this regard which is acceptable to the various sections of the society and also in tune with national ideology and development. This perhaps is also a reflection of nation's failure to come to terms politically with various national and international forces. Notwithstanding this indecisive state, at least three significant and positive factors with respect to growth of education during the period should be recognised. First of all, the nation has achieved considerable expansion of primary education facilities making thereby primary education more easily accessible to a large section of the population. Secondly, the national leaders irrespective of their military or civil stature bestowed great attention to the field of education and its role in national development. In fact, the country has witnessed an unprecedented number of committees and commissions on education within a decade of its existence. Even the two Five Year Plans have devoted special attention to the progress of education, particularly at the stage of primary education. Thirdly, the nation took on itself the major responsibility of evolving and implementing a uniform curriculum alongwith the necessary instructional material instead of leaving the poor students at the mercy of private authors and publishers. This, in fact, has been accompanied by another important move which brought financial as well as administrative control of the primary schools under national control. This move towards centralized control of education may not appear to be a progressive one when seen from a

utopian angle. However, one will be compelled to appreciate its relevance and contribution only when it is perceived in the context of the socio-economic reality prevailing in the country. This, however, does not imply that the final word has been said as to what should be taught and how it should be taught in the primary schools of Bangladesh. It is imperative that, for progress, these factors namely the curriculum and its implementation are brought under continuous evaluation and revision. The present study is, in fact, one such attempt to examine the existing curriculum in the historical context as described in this chapter.

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