



Black Market Education

“Numbers cannot define the quality of education,” said a renowned professor regarding the quality of education of Bangladesh. If numbers did define how good the education system was, Bangladesh is actually doing a phenomenal job. What used to be under 100 students receiving a GPA of 5 only a decade ago has risen to almost a hundred thousand. Students seem to be flourishing when it comes to receiving top notch results, and the passing of time seemed to have aided the passing rate of students in the National Board examinations. However, is the actual situation as rosy as the statistics tell us? Or is there an ugly truth hiding behind these numbers that we are not seeing?

The secret to getting a good grade often involves more dirty work than simply studying hard. National board examinations of Bangladesh, which are SSC (Secondary School Certificate) and HSC (Higher Secondary School Certificate), and some recent additions such as JSC (Junior School Certificate) and PSC (Primary School Certificate), have a shocking history of question paper leakage. For those unfamiliar with the term, this means that the question papers for the board examinations are leaked through various ways and end up with the students before the exams take place. Information regarding the board question papers are collected during ALL stages of creating the paper, i.e. whilst creating, moderating, proof reading, printing, sealing and distributing the papers. Complaints have come that even exam halls have taken advantage of this and joined in the parade. There are “dealers” who supply these question papers for a thick sum of money over to students over varying rates depending on the time. If you want to get the question paper a day earlier, you have to find yourself a reliable dealer and pay as much as BDT 15,000. You can get the question paper an hour before the exam for free.

Hundreds of students have been scammed and had paid in advance, only to find that these dealers were fraudulent and they received no help, and hence failed their examinations. Hundreds more have received help via these unfair means and passed, leaving their worth as much as any meritorious and hardworking student. This black market of question papers involves a vast community, including people from the Education Board, Primary Education Academy, coaching centers, and guide book centers. Private investigation teams from the media have found that they can simply walk into the printing press of the Education Ministry without being asked any questions. This leaves us wondering exactly how many people have taken advantage of such a situation, and how little the government cares regarding the issue. When asked, a senior police commissioner even stated that Bangladesh had a “*relatively low leakage of question papers*”. While we are left wondering what a healthy level of question paper leakage actually is, this black market of illegal distribution of board examination papers becomes a growing business each year.

The disaster for education does not end here. Cheating in examination is such a common phenomenon in the national board examinations that students fail to recognize this as anything immoral. Examination halls in more rural areas have students carrying cheat sheets and freely cheat while invigilators stand outside in the breeze. Students in the city resort to the use of Bluetooth to receive answers from outside. Some of these students have been caught with these devices. However, the number of students who have gotten away with such cheating methods are much larger. There have been more shocking discoveries where investigation have shown that other people take the examination in place of the student. A wife can sit for an exam meant for her husband, and a sister for her brother. These shocking truths allow us to see how little effort invigilators put into looking at student IDs, searching student possessions and even strictly invigilating exams at all.

While it is true that the number of students have increased in making the passing grades, it can be guessed that actual learning has barely taken place. A popular TV channel put the merit of the ‘GPA 5’ to test when they went to interview a few of the exam candidates who had received the noteworthy grades. The interview revealed the disastrous state of the future of Bangladesh. Not a single student could translate “I received GPA 5” into English, and most of them did not even know what GPA stood for. This video became viral and the nation became familiar with the “I am GPA 5” candidates of the future. The sad and ridiculous situation did not end there. Science students failed to state any of Newton’s theories, and one deemed Pythagoras to be a novelist. Students did not know what hardware or software was, or anything related to the general history of the country. Some stated

that Mount Everest was situated in England and one declared that the capital of Nepal was... Neptune. This noteworthy video revealed to us the actual state of the education of Bangladesh. What is frightening is that this is the case of most of the students, and the government has taken no action to do anything to improve the situation. All anyone can bear witness to here is a downward spiral of ignorance.

If this is not shocking enough, the education sector (or industry as it is clearly making a lot of money) has experienced a blossom of a new business: the university degree. Public university entrance exams are a crucial time in the lives of every student in the country. Often at times, there are over 50 students fighting for one seat at an entrance exam. If we have noticed the trend of the education black market, any desperate student is always taken advantage of. This is no exception. There were links online and often in person where people lure students into the web of cheating and often scams where the students have to put up a big amount of cash and are then guaranteed a spot in any desired university. Often even the entrance exam question papers are available in advance for steep prices. Renowned public universities, technical institutes and medical schools all now have a giant influx on unprepared and less talented students due to these malpractices, while actual talent becomes overshadowed.

University degrees are usually attained by hardworking students who often have to pay a steep tuition price and sacrifice four to five years of their lives. However, new businesses have bloomed where you can simply purchase a degree for a hefty sum of money and be a university graduate in a matter of weeks. Quiet little organizations have mushroomed all over the country, selling university graduate certificates that look deceptively authentic, and allow people to be graduates of institutes they have never been to. This unbelievable phenomenon has taken place, and the process to allow any of these to happen is relatively 'safe'. Television investigation has revealed that there are instructors all over the country who have a graduate certificate from institutions that they can say very little about. Some university chairmen had been found to be directly linked to these malpractices.

The attitude of the authorities towards these actions are simply unbelievable. The Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid declared to the media that there are policies against cheating and other malpractices, and some do get caught. However, he claimed that the authorities could not be responsible for all the criminals out there, which raises the important question: then who is? There is an endless stream of evidence which show the relaxed nature of the authorities, and how they refuse to take adequate action. The people responsible for grading board examination scripts are given special instructions to let more students pass, and get higher grades. They are requested to round a total of 27 to 33 marks to let the student pass, and if the student had not written anything at all, to write the answers and put down the grades. An anonymous script grader had brought in a hundred scripts to a television studio, which showed that all the scripts were written in the same handwriting. There were variations to answers here and there, but it was clear that they were written by the same person. Examination halls are poorly invigilated, and hiding cheat sheets and matching it to the question paper in advance is a common practice. Taking all this into consideration, how exactly have these "policies" helped in any way?

The impact of these are to be vastly destructive in the near future. The future population of Bangladesh will mostly consist of people with certificates but actually know nothing. Non-meritorious and lazy students will become the next batch of engineers and doctors, with little to no technical knowledge and a thirst to retake the money they had invested in coming to this position. People can simply claim to have a degree, whereas they may never have completed school at all. Putting all these to perspective, it is safe to say that Bangladesh is headed towards a bleak future.

Greed has destroyed everything that had held this country together. The thirst for capital has plagued all sectors of education, be it the board press, the question paper dealers, or the students who are simply looking for a safe future bright with the promise of money. Capitalism has truly infected the hearts of the Muslims, and this is what the results have come to: greed, taking advantage of people at desperate times, loss of morals and no regards to any sense of justice whatsoever.

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