

# **Improving the Relevance of Humanities Higher Education in Bangladesh**

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## **Abstract**

**This qualitative study deals with the question of how humanities education imparted at tertiary institutions in Bangladesh can be made relevant to the country's socio-economic, intellectual, political, cultural, aesthetic, moral, and ethical needs. Using an interpretive approach and relying mainly on printed materials – from both primary and secondary sources, the researcher explores the topic under study and shows that through appropriate curriculum, pedagogical, structural, and policy reforms the humanities disciplines can be made relevant to Bangladesh and its varied needs and exigencies. The researcher looks at the issue of relevance from historico-theoretical, doctrinal, and epistemological perspectives and attempts to resituate existing knowledge, models and paradigms in Bangladesh context in order to reform its humanities higher education. Unique in its kind in Bangladesh's scholarly arena, this study is expected to have significant impact on improving the current dilapidated state of humanities education in the country concerned. In addition, this study, as a sequel to its wider exploration of the field, endeavours to identify the current overall contour of higher education as well as make prognosis about its dimension in the foreseeable future.**

# Abbreviations

<b>AACSB</b>	<b>Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business</b>
<b>ABC</b>	<b>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</b>
<b>AHA</b>	<b>Australian Broadcasting Corporation</b>
<b>ANU</b>	<b>Australian National University</b>
<b>AUW</b>	<b>Asian University for Women</b>
<b>BANBEIS</b>	<b>Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics</b>
<b>BEC</b>	<b>Bangladesh Education Commission</b>
<b>BSS</b>	<b>Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (official news agency of Bangladesh)</b>
<b>Caltech</b>	<b>California Institute of Technology</b>
<b>CIRAC</b>	<b>Creative Industries Faculty and Research Centre</b>
<b>CNE</b>	<b>Commission on National Education</b>
<b>CCRG</b>	<b>Convergent Communications Research Group (at the University of Adelaide)</b>
<b>CIHE</b>	<b>Council for Industry and Higher Education (Britain)</b>
<b>CPD</b>	<b>Centre for Policy Dialogue (Dhaka, Bangladesh)</b>
<b>CSPW</b>	<b>Commission on Student Problems and Welfare</b>
<b>DS</b>	<b>The Daily Star (newspaper published from Dhaka)</b>
<b>DU</b>	<b>Dhaka University</b>
<b>EC</b>	<b>European Commission</b>
<b>ESL</b>	<b>English as a Second Language</b>
<b>ELT</b>	<b>English Language Teaching</b>
<b>GOP</b>	<b>Government of Pakistan</b>
<b>H/SS</b>	<b>Humanities and Social Sciences</b>
<b>ICSTM</b>	<b>Imperial College of Science, Technology &amp; Medicine</b>
<b>IMLI</b>	<b>International Mother Language Institute</b>
<b>LTU</b>	<b>La Trobe University</b>
<b>MIT</b>	<b>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</b>
<b>MOE</b>	<b>Ministry of Education, Bangladesh</b>

<b>MU</b>	<b>Monash University</b>
<b>NEC</b>	<b>National Education Commission</b>
<b>NHS</b>	<b>National Health Service</b>
<b>NEP</b>	<b>New Education Policy - 1969</b>
<b>NEP</b>	<b>National Education Policy - 2000</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-Governmental Organisation</b>
<b>nd</b>	<b>No date mentioned</b>
<b>np</b>	<b>No page number mentioned</b>
<b>OECD</b>	<b>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</b>
<b>PAA</b>	<b>Project on Accreditation and Assessment</b>
<b>QAA</b>	<b>Quality Assurance Agency (Britain)</b>
<b>QUT</b>	<b>Queensland University of Technology</b>
<b>R&amp;D</b>	<b>Research and Development</b>
<b>TAC</b>	<b>Transport Accident Commission (Australia)</b>
<b>UEC</b>	<b>University Enquiry Committee</b>
<b>UGC</b>	<b>University Grants Commission of Bangladesh</b>

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

In the backdrop of a fast changing “social and natural environment,” relevance is one of the most important ‘strands’ of higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Vessuri 1998, p. 6). Higher education is no longer considered a “pursuit of knowledge for its own sake”; instead, it has come to perform more pragmatic roles “primarily by supporting the economy and promoting the quality of life of its citizens” (Gibbons 1998, p. 1). In fact, at the advent of a new millennium higher education is no longer considered a pastime or mere scholarly adornment; nor is it a show of pedantry, nor a preparation for a life of contemplation or philosophic abstraction. It needs to have a pragmatic role in real life in its socio-economic contexts; increasingly it is asked to prove its relevance to society’s varied needs and exigencies – utilitarian, intellectual, cultural, aesthetic, moral, and ethical.

Given the fact that higher education has undergone a significant paradigmatic shift towards utilitarianism, it can no longer maintain its esoteric stance. In every country, undeniably there is a need for fresh research in order to realign its higher education in view of the changed circumstances. This study will explore the question of how humanities higher education in Bangladesh can be made more relevant as well as more responsive to the world of work and other socio-economic exigencies. It will explore the history of higher education in its wider or world perspective in order to trace its development on pragmatic utilitarian lines – higher education has served directly or indirectly some useful purposes at all stages of history. Then it will examine the works of prominent theorists in the field in order to trace its development from the time of Cardinal Newman to the current stage. It will take stock of different theories and attempt to synthesise conflicting theoretical views in order to preserve the holistic nature of higher education. Then it will examine the epistemological changes higher education has undergone in the recent decades in the production of knowledge and its utility. Having explored the higher education sector and its development in historical, theoretical and epistemological perspectives, the thesis will turn to Bangladesh, the main testing ground of the study. It will trace its development from the days of antiquity to the current day and show how such factors as colonial rule, policy indecisions, unplanned growth, and misdirected priorities have contributed to its lack of relevance. Then it will explore existing knowledge, experience, and models in order to

correct the current pressing problem of relevance of higher education in the humanities sector.

## **1.1 Background study**

### **1.1.1 Socio-economic and political circumstances of Bangladesh**

Bangladesh, until the partition of India in 1947, was part of the greater Indian subcontinent; and naturally it had had its fair share of participation in the rich socio-cultural and political mosaic that was India (Islam 2000). Traditional Indo-Aryan culture, manifested in Hinduism and Buddhism, later Muslim occupation, and last of all European influences, has shaped its socio-political, religious, and intellectual landscape. The European connection brought about significant transformation in its socio-economic fabric by breaking down the traditional feudalistic structure which was replaced by an emerging capitalistic economy and bourgeois culture. At intellectual level the introduction of modern education by the British played an important role in modernizing the society.

In 1947 when Pakistan came into being, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) became part of this newly created country as its distant outpost. On the political front while the whole of Pakistan experienced socio-political instability and turmoil with it having been under military rule for most of its 23 years' united existence, Bangladesh got more than its undue share of its political and economic woes. The socio-economic disparity between the two wings of Pakistan, separated by more than one thousand miles of Indian territory, became apparent very soon. The ruling oligarchy of Pakistan that predominantly represented West Pakistan exploited the eastern wing economically and politically. The socio-economic disparity, created through a deliberate policy move, had disastrous ramifications on Bangladesh in all its fronts, including education. The initial struggle for autonomy and economic emancipation ultimately flared into a full-scale liberation war in March 26, 1971; Bangladesh emerged as an independent state in December 16, the same year.

Although Bangladesh can take pride in its revolutionary birth, the political culture since its inception has seen no significant qualitative transformation. Its revolutionary birth with the promise of a prosperous secular country that saw a democratic constitution and an elected government in place within two years of its inception confronted graver crises when the country relapsed into political instability and uncertainty. Its founding father and architect

of the War of Independence was assassinated on August 15, 1975. From 1975 to 1991 it was directly or indirectly under military rule; the restoration of democracy in 1991 has made no real progress in terms of political stability and democratic dispensation.

A deltaic and riverine country on the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh sits on a land of 147,570 square kilometres. Its population, according to 2008 World Bank statistics, is 160 million while the density of population per sq km 979 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics), which is the highest in the world. It is one of the poorest countries in the world (40 percent of the population live below poverty level) with a per capita income of U\$599. Literacy among 15+ population is 53 percent; infant mortality is 43 per 1000 births (2008 World Bank statistics). While gross primary enrolment is 92 percent, 50 percent drop out before completing five years of schooling. According to a news report, 82 percent discontinue studies between classes II and X (82% drop out between class II and SSC exams, bdnews24.com, May 16, 2010). However, against all such negative indications, the “country’s economic record ... has led to significant improvements in the social indicators ...” (World Bank 2006) – it has made noteworthy headway in GDP growth (more than 5 percent a year during the 1990s), female empowerment, population control (current growth rate is 1.5 percent), life expectancy at birth has risen to 66 years, and it has achieved parity in female enrolment at primary and secondary levels. In the agricultural sector, despite frequent natural calamities, the country is on the verge of achieving food autarky. Actually, its biggest strength is the people who, in the face of unprecedented disasters, both man-made and natural, remain resilient and weather all calamities and misfortunes. If its hardworking population can be transformed into an efficient instrument for development through proper education, it can build a very promising future for the populace.

## **1.1.2 Current structure of the education system in Bangladesh**

### **1.1.2.1 Different tiers and streams**

There are four tiers of education in Bangladesh – primary (five years of schooling from class 1 to class 5); secondary (classes 6-10), higher secondary (classes 11 and 12), and tertiary or postsecondary education. Basically, there are three streams of education in Bangladesh which are as follows:

**General education:** This stream consists of the humanities, social sciences, commerce, and pure sciences disciplines. General education up to lower secondary (class VIII) follows a unified curriculum; at secondary and higher secondary phases the curriculum and syllabuses branch off into humanities, commerce or business studies, and science groups. On successful completion of 10 years of studies students get SSC (Secondary School Certificate) and after 12 years studies they get HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate). At the tertiary levels, the courses offered are BA, BSc, BCom (Pass), BA, BSc, BCom (Honours), two-year MA/MCom/MSc (for Pass graduates), one-year MA/MCom/MSc (for Honours graduates), MPhil, and PhD. General universities and only selected colleges affiliated with the National University offer the Honours and one-year MA/MCom/MSc courses while the Pass bachelor and two-year MA/MCom/MSc courses are available at colleges only. Notably, the Pass bachelor's degree is of three-year duration and generalist in nature; students study the core subjects (Bengali and English) as well as a number of electives depending on whether they study arts, science, or commerce disciplines. They do not major in any particular subjects and are considered generalists. The Honours course is of four-year duration and students major in one of the subjects of their disciplinary choice. Alongside their Honours majors, students study core Bengali and English as well as some minor subjects to fulfil general course requirements.

**Vocational and professional education:** The whole Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector consists of specialized colleges (College of Textile Technology and Bangladesh College of Leather Technology; they offer degree level specialized qualifications), polytechnic institutes (they offer four-year diploma level qualifications in a varieties of engineering fields and are the main source of mid-level technical manpower), technical schools (offering SSC vocational certificates), colleges (offering business management certificates at HSC level), and vocational and trade schools offering trade qualifications (Website, Directorate of Technical Education; also, Rafique et al 2004). The vocational colleges and polytechnic institutes that offer specialized technical qualifications as well as engineering diploma form part of the tertiary system; however, the vocational and technical schools form segments of secondary and higher secondary qualifications.

The professional education sector consists of agricultural, technological, engineering, and medical education studied at bachelor (course duration is four years except medicine [five years]), master, MPhil, and PhD levels. Engineering, technological, agriculture, medical colleges and universities offer these courses and graduates, unlike those from vocational colleges, build career as top level professionals in their respective fields.

**Madrasa (Islamic) education:** It is a parallel alternative stream along with that of general education and consists of as many tiers of the latter with different name tags or titles – Ebtedayee (equivalent to primary; five years), Dakhil (secondary; five years), Alim (higher secondary; two years), and Fazil and Kamil (tertiary; two + two years, equivalent to bachelor and master qualifications, respectively). In an effort to modernize this stream that offers mainly religion-based instruction with no or little practical or vocational skills, limited humanities and science-based subjects have been introduced at Dakhil and Alim stages.

### **1.1.2.2 Education providers and funding**

The education system is principally financed by the state under different funding arrangements; however, alongside public funding, there are private endeavours as well. Until 1992 all the universities were public and the bulk of their expenses (90%; rest from tuition and other sources) were born from the public exchequer. While the funding arrangements for public universities (currently 32; another in the pipeline) remain unchanged, the government allowed universities at private initiatives through a legislation enacted in 1992. Currently, there are 54 private universities in Bangladesh that are run by private entrepreneurs or organizations mainly as for-profit enterprises. However, the college sector bears the major burden of higher education in Bangladesh. A good number of colleges and higher madrasas are fully run and financed by the government while the vast majority (80%; Johanson 2000) of them are non-government, privately run and predominantly financed by the government (at least 90% of staff and teacher salary comes from government exchequer). Secondary schools, colleges, and madrasas enjoy the same dual arrangements. At primary level majority schools and madrasas are public, and are funded and managed by the government; the rest are nongovernment registered primary schools that get partial salary and infrastructural supports from the government. The TVET sector is mainly state funded although there are some privately funded and managed

technical colleges and institutions.

### **1.1.2.3 Enrolment patterns**

Of all the public universities 30 are campus-based, one (National University) is affiliating and another (Bangladesh Open University) offers courses on distance mode through its regional centres and branches. The National University offers its courses through 1800 affiliated degree colleges dispersed all over the country. The campus-based public universities together had 153,249 students in 2008; the National University and Bangladesh Open University had 855,744 and 232,353 students between them. The 54 private universities enrolled 124,267 students in the same period (Islam 2009).

The participation rate of higher education in the 18-23 age cohort is only 4.6%, against 11.9% in India (Tipu 2007). The enrolment patterns of the public universities heavily tilt towards the humanities and non-science disciplines with only 15% and 2.86% enrolling in science & technology and engineering disciplines, respectively (Tipu 2007). Data from the UGC Annual Report show that approximately 64% of the students appearing in degree examinations in 2008 were from humanities and social sciences disciplines. Only 18% appeared in commerce subjects while the same rate for science disciplines was 13 percent (Islam 2009). Although such statistics sometimes differ, the fact that enrolment in the humanities is disproportionately high is well- documented. As claimed by a newspaper report (Rahman, 2009), of the total enrolment at Dhaka University in 2007-2007, 47.67% students came from the Faculty of Arts; that year the Arts and Social Science Faculties enrolled a total of 3,350 (60.65%) students against 1293 in the Faculty of Science and 880 in the Commerce Faculty. Johanson (2000, p. 63) criticizes such “distortions in the allocation of students by field of study. ... Overall 83 percent of university students enroll in general universities, versus 17 percent in agricultural, engineering, and science and technology. Underenrolment in technical fields is particularly acute in terms of outputs: technical fields accounted for only 2 percent of the bachelor’s degrees awarded in 1996 and only 1.3 percent of postgraduate degrees. The situation in degree colleges is similar, with an overwhelming emphasis on general subjects.”

Based on a UNDP review, Johanson (2000, p. 63) blames an inadequate number of places in science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and medicine for low enrolment in these fields. As the same news report (Rahman, 2009) reveals, due to a shortage of infrastructural facilities the job-oriented disciplines such as computer science, genetic engineering, biotechnology, pharmacy, and business related fields cannot accommodate students' demand. While there are demands for age-oriented courses, the authority is constrained by poor infrastructural facilities to admit students to such disciplines. As the arts and social sciences disciplines do not require heavy infrastructures, the Dhaka University authority, as the Vice-Chancellor of the University Dr Arefin claims, finds it convenient to increase the number of seats in the arts and social sciences. Siddiqui (1997) blames the lop-sided distribution of students at schools for the arts-science anomaly that continues into the tertiary level. Besides, the science courses are mainly reliant on books and materials written in English, and given the students' weaker knowledge of English many with science background at secondary level opt at the tertiary phase for the humanities that can be studied in Bengali. Also, most of the low paid blue-collar clerical and teaching jobs, as Siddiqui (1997) points out, are reportedly filled by arts graduates, and this may be a reason that weans away students from science and science-based courses.

#### **1.1.2.4 Admission policies and procedures**

Admission into the public universities is highly selective as well as limited by infrastructural constraints. The countries' on-campus public universities can accommodate only 20 percent of all the admission aspirants. Admission into public colleges that offer Honours courses are selective but not that competitive. In this regard, Siddiqui (1997, pp. 69-70) makes a pertinent observation: "Even so, the percentage of enrolment would indicate that access to a coveted course at the undergraduate level to [sic] limited to a hopeless minority of the students at that level. A combination of the twin tests of privilege – by institution and by course – would finally yield a clearer picture of the access situation, indicating the percentage of students having an access simultaneously to a good college and to an Honours course in a subject of one's choice. This situation leads to a very big gap between the student's "choice and fate." At least 50 percent of students end up getting admitted to an institute or course that is not her/his first or even second choice. Once admitted, a student has little scope to transfer to her/his preferred course as there is little internal mobility within institution or within the system (Siddiqui 1997, p. 70). Notably, admission into public and non-government colleges to BA/BSc/BCom (Pass) courses is

open and virtually anyone with an HSC pass qualification is admitted, irrespective of academic results.

One pertinent issue as to admission policy deserves further explanation here. Admission to Honours courses into colleges under the National University is controlled and decided through uniform admission tests conducted centrally by the University itself. The individual colleges do not have any say about who and how many to be admitted. Even students' subject choices are determined centrally on the basis of results in admission tests (a major portion of which is anachronistically based on general knowledge and current affairs). In the public universities mostly the individual faculties conduct uniform admission tests and recommend students to respective departments. As to students' subject choices, students get admission not on the basis of choice (although his choice is taken into consideration) but on the basis of scores in the admission tests as well as on the basis of the courses' demand and prestige factors. In this case students' aptitude or intellectual ability plays a minor role which may affect their motivation and performance later.

#### **1.1.2.5 Management and administration**

Two ministries (The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education) oversee the administration and management of the entire education system through their respective hierarchical administrative set-up. The primary and mass education ministry looks after primary, non-formal and adult education while the general, technical, vocational, madrasa, technological, and the professional streams of education are administered by the Ministry of Education. Top-down in nature, the ministries act as the apex body and run the whole juggernaut of administration through their own directorates (Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, directorate of Primary Education, Directorate of Technical Education) and their zonal, district, and local offices. Entrusted with the responsibility of implementing respective ministry policies, the directorates have direct control over government colleges, institutes, and schools; also, they exert indirect control over the non-government colleges, schools, and madrasas through payment of subvention, salary, and similar financial assistance.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh is a statutory intermediary body and acts as a buffer between the universities and the government and helps keep the government bureaucracy at the universities' arm's length which is needed for the latter's

academic freedom and administrative autonomy. However, it has minimal administrative control over the universities as the latter function under their own statutory framework. Its major objectives are to “supervise, maintain, promote and coordinate university education. It is also responsible for maintaining standard and quality in all the public and private universities in Bangladesh. The UGC assesses the needs of the public universities in terms of funding and advise Government in various issues related to higher education in Bangladesh” (UGC Website). It may be noted that the president or prime minister of the country acts as chancellor of the public universities and despite the UGC’s intermediary roles, the government is able to exert its bureaucratic and political clout by appointing and removing vice-chancellors of the universities on political allegiance.

The affiliating National University administers the academic activities of all the degree colleges and its major functions include conducting examinations and awarding degrees, granting affiliation to colleges, monitoring qualities, devising undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate syllabus and curriculum. The academic and examining activities of the secondary and higher secondary institutions are conducted by different education boards. There are separate education boards for general, madrasa, and technical education. The principal activities of the education boards are granting affiliation, registering students, conducting examinations, and awarding certificates and diplomas.

To sum up, the whole education system is a complex top-down process. While the public universities are autonomous, the government exerts direct or indirect influences through the funding mechanism or at times through direct political and bureaucratic interference. Opening or dropping new courses is dependent on state funding as well as subject to prior UGC approval. As all the public colleges, schools, and institutions are funded and directly administered by the government, their teachers and other academic and non-academic staff are treated as government employees with no power to influence course expansion or reduction; all decisions are made by the respective ministries and their bureaucratically-dominated directorates. The non-government institutions are constrained by the same central funding and administrative arrangements. The academic, curriculum, admission, assessment, and examination activities of the public and non-government degree colleges are centrally conducted by the National University with the individual colleges having no authority whatsoever. Such a top-down hierarchical dispensation impedes the system’s quantitative and qualitative growth and expansion.

## **1.1.3 Higher education in Bangladesh with respect to its relationship with the economy**

### **1.1.3.1 Education-development-growth connection**

As to the education-development-growth nexus, Puukka and Marmolejo (2008, p. 218; also, Bloom et al 2005; King & McGrath 2002) point to evidences that “[h]igher levels of education attainment bring benefits to individuals and countries in the form of higher employment rates and earnings, and growth and economic development for national economies.” Increased spending on higher education can result in “economic growth”, “sustained income growth”, “poverty reduction” by way of improved productivity, entrepreneurship, specialization, and job skills (Bloom et al 2005, p. 17). On the public front, in a knowledge economy higher education can accelerate economic growth and development “through technological catch-up [with the developed countries] ... as graduates are likely to be more aware of and better able to use new technologies” (ibid. P. i). Citing examples from the newly industrialized countries of East and South East Asia such as China, Taiwan, Korea, and Singapore, Rahman (1994; also, Rahman 2002; Islam 2000) illustrates how these countries’ educational profile, considered ‘key’ to their uplift, has helped them grow economically. As cited by this researcher, in Singapore while in the 1950s poverty incidence rate was 25 percent, in 1982-83 this rate declined to .03 percent; in South Korea in 1965 the rate of poverty incidence was 40.9 percent and it dramatically came down to 4 percent in 1984. In Indonesia, in the period from 1960 to 1985 adult literacy increased from 39 percent to 72 percent; in the same period per capita income doubled. Based on a comparative study conducted by the World Bank (1998) that regards knowledge as development, it is known that forty years back South Korea and Ghana had the same per capita income; by 1990 South Korea’s per capita income was six times higher than Ghana’s.

Tilak (2003) uses tangible data to show that socio-economic development is generally linked to a country’s high Higher Education Attainment (HEA). In the Asia-Pacific region, most of the countries – such as New Zealand (39%), Korea (21.1%), Japan (20.7%), Taiwan (17.8%), Hong Kong (14.5%), Kuwait (16.4%), Israel (11.2) – that have 10 percent or above HEA rates (among adults of 25+ age-group; according to 2001-02 statistics) have developed economies (however, countries such as Mongolia [23.4], the Philippines [22%], despite having higher HEA, have failed to develop their economies). On the other hand,

all the countries (Fiji, Iraq, Vietnam, Pakistan, Indonesia, Myanmar, Maldives, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, China, Cambodia, and Nepal) with lower than five percent HEA have underdeveloped economies. This corroborates the view that “the larger the stock of population with higher education, higher could be the economic growth” (Tilak, p. 158). The same trend is true for Technology Index Attainment (TIA): the higher the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of higher education, the higher the Technology Index Attainment. As to the linkage between higher education and social development, Tilak (2003, p. 162) refers to evidences that higher education, either in the form of higher attainment or gross enrolment, has an emulating impact on both human development and gender development indexes: “Higher the level of higher education in a society, whether in stock or flow forms, higher can be the level of human development, through its influence on two main components of human development index, viz., the life expectancy, and GDP per capita.”

Empirical research that has specifically targeted Bangladesh also indicates that there is a close correlation between educational efficiency and economic growth. According to Azad (2010), the poor-performing tertiary education sector in Bangladesh hinders economic growth. The fact that in Bangladesh higher education has an economic value as well as is rewarding financially at private level makes it especially attractive to the students and their guardians alike (Siddiqui 1997). Chowdhury (1997, p. 7) considers it the “only means for upward mobility through a relatively highly rewarding modern sector job,” and she substantiates it with plausible statistics: “In 1992, the basic monthly salary for an entry-level secondary school teacher was Taka 1,200 (US\$31) to Tk 2,335 (US\$60), which was 1.75 to 3.3 times more than the GNP per capita. A recent study shows that on average an additional year of schooling increased the wage by 4 percent in Bangladesh.” Karmakar (2006, p. 6) links Bangladesh’s economic growth specifically to female education: “... an extra year of female schooling raises the growth rate between two to four percent per year.” Chowdury (2002, p. 509; also, Rahman 2003, p. 8), based on research carried out by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), outlines how higher education helps reduce poverty in Bangladesh: “Households without any formal education have about 6 times higher poverty than with access to higher education.” Rahman et al (2008, p. 4) are of the view that in Bangladesh the “level of productivity and earnings and, hence the access to remunerative employment, of an individual is positively related to his/her level of education.”

### **1.1.3.2 Structure of the labour market and unemployment situation in Bangladesh**

As Rahman et al (2008) point out, in 2006 the standard unemployment rate in Bangladesh was 4.2 percent while that of underemployment was 24.5 percent (the underemployment rate of the female workforce being 68.3 percent). In the same year, of all the employment absorbing sectors agriculture was still the highest with 22.8 million (48 percent) compared with 6.9 million (15 percent) in industry, and 17.7 million (37 percent) in the service sector. In the same period labour force participation rate was 58.5 percent (male and female ratios being 86.8 and 29.2 percent, respectively). The ratio between formal and informal sector employment was 22 percent and 78 percent, respectively. As to the status of employment, self-employment constituted the largest segment providing jobs to 42 percent of the employed workforce; this was followed by unpaid workers (22 percent), day laborers (18 percent), employees (14 percent), and employers and other categories (4 percent). In this regard, Rahman et al (2008, p. 1) refer to some important trends: the labor market grows relatively sluggishly at 1.6 percent per year, and this growth cannot cope with the “labor force growing faster than the employment potential. ... Although the ‘standard’ unemployment rate is low at 4.2 percent in 2006, it does not provide a real picture of the supply-demand balance including the degree of inefficiency that prevails in the labor market.” As to the education level of the workforce, in 2002-2003, 50.6 percent had no education at all; 17 percent had primary education while 10.8 percent possessed junior secondary (classes 6-8) education; 8.5 percent held classes 9-10 level qualification and 8.7 percent were HSC diploma holders; 4.4 percent had degree and other qualifications (UGC 2006).

As to the problem of educated unemployment in Bangladesh, it has assumed a ‘severe’ proportion (Islam 1999), and there are reliable sources to assess the issue of educated unemployment in the country. According to studies conducted by the Bangladesh Planning Commission (cited by Islam 1999), in 1978 of all the economically active educated persons (having secondary [Year 10] or higher qualifications) who were actively looking for jobs, about 48 percent were unemployed. In real figures, 665,000 (this does not include the 175,000 inappropriately-placed jobseekers) people were fully unemployed out of a total of 1390,000 active educated job seekers. As a 1990-Bangladesh Public Service Commission estimate puts it, “... approximately 8.7 million educated unemployed people [were] seeking jobs in the country [however, no specific time frame mentioned]” (cited in Islam

1999, pp. 19-20). In 1978 the rate of unemployment among the humanities graduates was 55 percent (this figure includes those who were inappropriately placed) while this rate for MA degree holders was 46.66 percent (Islam 1999).

Later statistics also point to high incidence of graduate unemployment. As Chowdhury (1997) points out, in 1984, a total of 171,303 graduates entered the job market while available vacancies were 43,972. Of them 145,385 were generalists graduates who vied for 8,931 vacancies; job seekers with MA qualifications were 1515 against 279 vacancies. This means overall 74 percent humanities MAs would remain unemployed or underemployed in that year. The situation aggravates when the backlog of past graduates is added to the new entrants.

However, such an unemployment problem is not solely due to a faulty education system; the country's overall socio-economic situation is also responsible. In this regard, statistics on uneducated unemployment appear to be pertinent. In Bangladesh, the unemployment rate among people with no education is (according to 2000 BIDS [Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies] Household Earning Survey [HES]) 1.4 percent, against the national unemployment rate of 4.2 percent. This tendency proves that educated unemployment rate is higher as the country cannot create employment opportunities for the educated. So, an important factor behind high educated unemployment in Bangladesh is that the "rapid increase of enrolment in higher education in the face of sluggish economic activities only meant that the education system kept on producing graduates irrespective of their employability in the economy. Consequently, there has been an increase in the number of inappropriately placed or openly unemployed graduates" (Islam 1999, p. 92). The country's not so robust economy, faulty government policies or lack of proper policy direction, failure to effect a happy balance between the demand-supply equation of higher education graduates contribute significantly to the problem of educated unemployment. As seen, in the Philippines and Mongolia even with greater participation in higher education the economy remains underdeveloped as other concomitant factors do not act well in concert with educational achievement.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem and the research question

As to the strengths of the higher education system in Bangladesh, in some universities, university faculties, and a few colleges there are enclaves of superior quality teaching. A 1998 Asia Week survey of Asia's best universities ranked Dhaka University 44<sup>th</sup> of 67 leading Asian universities, and it was ahead of many well known universities of Australia, the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, and Vietnam (Johanson 2000, p. 62). It scored well on student selectivity, and a "valid admissions system and terminal examinations exist, i.e., the most academically able from among the applicants tend to be admitted and graduated eventually. At the better universities the quality of teaching of theory, at least, is reportedly high" (ibid). However, the overall quality of higher education in Bangladesh is not at all satisfactory, and as such it "remains a serious cause for concern"; both public and private universities suffer from "quality problems", and it is "generally agreed ... that the quality of higher education in Bangladesh has declined steadily, in some cases quite alarmingly, over the last two decades" (Aminuzzaman [nd], p. 1).

The NEC (National Education Commission) 2003 sheds enough light on the current status of humanities education in Bangladesh with respect to curriculum pattern, course structure, and its overall qualitative and quantitative aspects. Humanities and social sciences courses are offered at Honours and Masters levels in public universities as well as 150 (currently, the number has gone up to 199) colleges affiliated with National University. The NEC 2003 points to weak academic performance of the humanities and social sciences disciplines taught at these colleges, and students who come out of these institutions with degrees are hardly equipped with employable skills. The type of education they get simply worsens the problem of the educated unemployed in the country.

More importantly, unplanned expansion of programs in the humanities has had negative ramifications on overall quality. A lack of linkage between expansion in quantity and future employment needs produces none but a large number of unemployed graduates. The NEC 2003 (p. 168) sums up the grim scenario thus: "The four or five years students spend in getting education after their higher secondary education help produce little knowledge or learning. What is being produced is a band of unemployed youths with

certificates only who can hardly contribute to the country's development in any way [my translation from Bengali]." Research in the humanities is non-existent in colleges; in universities, research, limited though, is cheapened through introduction of MPhil and PhD as their expansion is quantitative rather than qualitative. All these shortcomings influence negatively the overall knowledge base of students, and the limited knowledge or skills they attain are not enough to create superior human resources.

Course offerings lack diversification, and the NEC 2003 is critical of the four-year integrated Honours program recently introduced in the public universities as well as in the colleges under the National University. Instead of incorporating age-appropriate courses such as computer, research methodology, and courses that deal with immediate socio-economic needs of the country, only courses having little relevance to the current condition as well as to the international trends have been cobbled up together. As a result, pure subject/specialization centric education is still getting priority.

What the UGC (2006, p. 14) says as to the relevance of higher education in Bangladesh is pertinent: "Historically, the public universities have been producing graduates in humanities and sciences that have little linkage with the available job market or real life situation that have [sic] experienced massive changes over the years." The system suffers from a lack of relevance as the linkage between manpower requirements and higher education is very tenuous. The sector's growth tilts disproportionately towards liberal arts and general education, and the history of its growth chronicles its lack of "attention to employability and work efficiency demanded by both the graduates and the labor market" (Chowdhury 1997, p. 4). Although the curriculum has recently been geared, to some extent, towards job skills and employment needs, the system is still elitist. As a result, the "[s]ystem produces an inordinately high number of Arts graduates with little job prospects for them. This results in (i) unemployment, (ii) underemployment ..." (Siddiqui 1997, p. 72; also, Nimbark 2001; Johanson 2000). Lack of relevance of higher education to the job market and other socio-economic needs leads to high unemployment and this is especially true of "liberal arts graduates, particularly from the degree colleges ..." (Johanson 2000, p. 63).

Tertiary places are made available on the basis of availability of resources, not on the assessment of needs in the job market. Besides, no consideration is given to the supply of graduates and the country's capacity to absorb them. This is more true of arts and

commerce graduates as these disciplines thrive on popular demand rather than conscious planning and job-market forecasting (Siddiqui 1997, p. 73; also, Haque 2005; NEC 2003). Rahman (2009), in a recent newspaper report, appropriately touches on this issue. As this news report reveals, Dhaka University, the premier institution of the country, admits students in larger numbers to subjects that have little relevance to the job market. They include such arts and humanities subjects as Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Pali, Sanskrit, world religion, linguistics, Islamic studies, Islamic history and culture, history, philosophy. The number of arts and humanities students at Dhaka University constitutes 47.67 per cent of the entire student population and the writer of this report categorically blames the university authority for admitting students to such archaic subjects without taking into consideration their employability as well as demand in the job market. This trend precludes employability of these graduates and after graduation with Honours and Masters level qualifications they join the band of the unemployed. Of the arts and humanities course, according to this thesis, only English and Bengali have relevance of some sort to the job market.

The whole system suffers from both internal and external inefficiency. While internal efficiency (quality of teaching, physical facilities, curriculum, quality of teachers among others) is conspicuously absent, the country's failure to successfully utilize the final product results in a significant wastage in terms of talents and money. It is “characterized by a mismatch of the objectives and the curriculum. The lack of a need-based curriculum renders higher education useless in most cases” (Ali 2004, np). As to external efficiency (which is related to the demand for employable skills and knowledge acquired by students through the system), higher education has failed to “produce the right kind of skilled manpower for some sectors, while there is an oversupply of graduates in such fields as liberal arts and social sciences for which there is very little demand in the country” (Ali 2004, np; also, Ali 2006).

The Bangladesh education system from elementary to higher level has no clear-cut objectives and as such it is devoid of productivity. It is a system that produces graduates with no productive skills the country needs for its development economically (Ahmad 2000, p. 27; Khan 2009). Ali (2004) blames outmoded curriculum and its stagnancy that has remained virtually unchanged since 1921 for such lack of relevance as students are deprived of higher education appropriate for the twenty-first century. A newspaper editorial (New Nation 2005, np) reinforces the same: “Judged by such a criterion, the

education system in Bangladesh is certainly inadequate, outdated and limited. First of all, it is still sunk in theoretical or textbook education and that too substantially in humanities and religious education.”

Another glaring shortcoming of the system is that institutions have virtually no freedom to adjust to the requirements of the job market, and such “structural rigidities also impede the opening, closing, expansion, and contraction of courses in response to market demand” (Johanson 2000, p. 64). This means that institutions lack the freedom to expand and contract in response to the needs of the market, which precludes structural change and adjustment. Moreover, university departments and their course offerings as well as the course contents are narrow, and as such lack an inter-disciplinary approach. Therefore, they are not geared to the needs of a dynamic labour market. The affiliated colleges that absorb ninety per cent enrolments of the sector are more susceptible to such rigidities, and hence they are unable to introduce courses that are in demand or drop courses that have less “student demand [a proxy for market demand]” (ibid).

What is outlined above brings to the fore humanities higher education’s lack of relevance and linkage to the reality of Bangladesh that results in high graduate unemployment, wastage of talent as graduates face difficulties getting gainful employment in their fields of expertise, poor socio-economic, cultural and intellectual development as education fails to produce trained and educated human resources for such development. This thesis mainly aims at improving relevance of this sector, and the main research question to be dealt with in this study is:

How can the humanities sector of Bangladesh higher education be made relevant to various utilitarian, socio- political, intellectual, cultural and ethico-moral situations?

### **1.3 Rationale**

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with new paradigmatic and epistemological shifts in the nature, utility and production of knowledge, deserves to be called a watershed period in the field of higher education. Investigations into the nature of such changes may usher in new possibilities and innovations. In this regard, the higher education system in Bangladesh, especially its humanities sector, is not properly equipped to meet the challenges posed by the emerging trends and changes. If such a scenario is taken into consideration, a new study in the area of higher education is legitimately due. This study, having its sole focus

on the problem of relevance, will have a significant impact on the higher education system of the country with regard to its policy, planning, and, above all, responsiveness to Bangladesh's different needs and expectations.

## **1.4 Intended contribution**

This thesis will make definitive contributions to the realm of higher education in general and humanities higher education in Bangladesh in particular in a number of aspects. It will have a unique historical insight into the topic of higher education and its relevance; it will attempt a theoretical synthesis through an in-depth treatment of different theorists in the field; it will help situate the humanities in the light of the new paradigmatic changes in knowledge production and its use; it will take into account research outputs produced in the wider field of higher education and then apply them to Bangladesh situation after contextual adjustment. As a whole it will be a reliable document in the critical assessment of the relevance of higher education and its contextualization in a different setting, in its case Bangladesh.

## **1.5 Defining key terms**

### **Relevance**

A classic and timeless definition of 'relevance' is given by Bruner (1972) who defines it as the 'relation' of education to individuals and society. It can be used in two senses – social relevance and personal relevance. The former refers to education that has impact on the problems human beings face collectively whose solutions may have significant ramifications on their existence as a species. The latter refers to the type of education that is "self-rewarding by some existential criterion of being 'real', or 'exciting' or 'meaningful'" (Bruner 1972, p. 114). Relevance actually deals with "means-ends knowledge" (ibid) that allows learners to fulfil goals that they consider useful.

## **1.6 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis' structure as well as chapter organisation does not strictly follow a traditional format. I have avoided a formal literature review chapter. In doing so I have followed Lichtman (2010 [published in advance]) who brings to the fore a number of limitations of literature review. One important limitation is that if the topic under study is not already well-researched, "the researcher might not find relevant research" (Lichtman 2010, p. 127).

In Bangladesh context, higher education is the least researched area; especially, when it comes to the question of relevance, the situation exacerbates beyond any mention.

Also, Lichtman (2010, p. 128) convincingly argues that “a literature review should be interwoven into the framework of a qualitative research project ... .” She recommends that the qualitative researcher should become “familiar with some of the related literature as [she] proceed[s] with [her] study, but not ... be limited by a complete literature review prior to embarking on [her] research” (ibid). Silverman (2005, p. 299) is against ‘lumping’ the relevant literature just into one chapter, which means that the researcher can bring in the pertinent literature when there is a need for it, not in a segregated chapter, but during data analysis. In such a case the research problem can be nested in the introduction of the thesis.

As to the citation practice in this thesis, in case of some direct quotations from short newspaper or journal articles I have not mentioned page numbers. This has happened when the electronic versions of articles and official reports have not either followed the original pagination or not mentioned page numbers at all. However, the veracity of such direct quotations without page numbers is beyond any doubt as the materials from which such quotations have been taken are short newspaper or journal articles and available as well as verifiable electronically.

## **1.7 Some conceptual frameworks**

### **1.7.1 A framework as to the legitimacy of comparing educational provision in rich countries with that in poor countries such as Bangladesh**

Cross-national and cross-cultural influence on knowledge and educational policy is very common and a reality in a globalised world, and Altbach (1978, p. 301) aptly points out in this regard: “No nation or culture is truly independent in terms of its intellectual life, and all depend to a great extent on an exchange of knowledge.” Marginson and Rhoades (2002, p. 282) seem to reinforce the same view when they say that in the current context higher education institutions are global entities that function through a reciprocal interplay or healthy coexistence of global, national, and local (‘glonacal’) elements. The modern university, although basically of western origin or model, is by now a truly international

institution that has undergone considerable cross-national and cross-cultural adaptation and borrowing. In fact, knowledge, through such adaptation and borrowing, has assumed a common supranational character facilitating its use and transfer beyond national and cultural boundaries. However, while the modern university expands its functional jurisdiction internationally, it retains its national character; and this dual role of the modern university – to contribute to national exigencies and at the same time to participate internationally – works under a framework that enables the developing nations to borrow in an international knowledge network from the technologically developed industrialized countries.

The very act of knowledge transfer and intellectual cooperation across national frontiers presumably works in a world that is based on ‘inequalities’ or centre-periphery power relationship. On one side of the spectrum are the countries of the ‘center’ – the developed nations that produce and claim ownership of most of the knowledge and scholarship; on the other side are the developing countries on the ‘periphery’ that possess little advanced knowledge and scholarship of their own. The universities at the ‘center’ “give direction, provide models, produce research, and in general function as the pinnacles of the academic system;” the universities at the periphery “copy developments from abroad, produce little that is original, and are generally not at the frontiers of knowledge” (Altbach 1998, p. 20). To illustrate the cross-national transfer of educational experiences, we may examine how the Asian countries developed their university systems through borrowing from the developed West. Virtually, all the Asian countries, including Japan, were dependent on the West in building their knowledge base through their university systems. Notably, “... few Asian nations look to the experiences of their neighbors but rather search in the West for ideas and models” (Altbach 1989, p. 27). Superiority or even monopoly of the West in scientific innovation and production of knowledge through higher education and research, the predominance of western academic publications, western curriculum approaches and assessment methods, and the dominance of English as the language of international scholarship have put the countries of the West at the centre of knowledge exchange. As well as, “large-scale exchange of academics and students is a source of considerable Western influence. In general, Western academic institutions are not greatly affected by Asian and cultural models ... The influence is usually from the centre to the periphery” (Altbach 1989, pp. 21-22). Also, “total rejection of Western academic ideas has not worked,” and it is evident from how Japan’s attempts prior to the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to jettison the western models of higher education did not work; China’s failed

experimentation with indigenous models during the cultural revolution is another recent example. In India, the Muslim rejection of western education in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries resulted in relegating the Muslims to an inferior place in society.

In the case of Bangladesh, such a centre-periphery framework has worked in building its higher education system. Situated on the extreme periphery of international knowledge network, Bangladesh is heavily dependent on the West in the sphere of knowledge production, research outputs, scientific and technological innovations, curriculum innovation, and educational models. Although it has achieved political independence, it has made little headway in the socio-economic sectors, which hinders developing its higher education system based on indigenous resources and expertise. As a result, when the question of educational borrowing arises, it has to look towards the developed West for direction and imitable models. While Bangladesh's own intellectual poverty plays an important dependency role, the cross-national dependence on intellectual and educational products in the globalized world gives it a legitimacy to borrow educational experience and expertise from the developed West.

### **1.7.2 A conceptual discussion on the working of a tiered higher education system**

Higher education, previously considered elitist as well as a privilege, has undergone since the Second World War significant transformations, especially in terms of its functions, access, curriculum, academic standard, pedagogy or forms of instruction, students' career aspirations, and above all in the enrolment pattern reflected through its "rate of growth", "absolute size", and the "proportion of relevant age group" (Trow 2005, p. 2). By using all these concepts as criteria, Trow (2005; also, Scott 1995) classifies higher education into three distinct forms – elite (enrolment up to 15 percent of the relevant age cohort), mass (16-50 percent), and universal (beyond 50 percent), with each form having its own characteristic features.

In the elite system, until 1950 Western universities used to train and prepare students in a collegiate and supportive environment for future leadership in politics, for civil service, the learned professions, and in the academia. Teachers and students were members of a community of scholars, and students were socialized into a special way of life through the shaping of mind and character. There was a tentative agreement as to the nature of the

content of higher education which has currently been watered down through mission diversification. Nowadays, in addition to transmitting knowledge and skills as well as shaping mind and character, elite higher education infuses in students ‘ambition’ so that they can “accomplish large and important discoveries, lead great institutions, influence their country’s laws and government, and add substantially to knowledge” (Trow 2005, p. 12). Naturally, such responsibilities require of students greater motivation, perseverance, and dedication. In keeping with the nature of skills, knowledge, and relevant expertise which students require to prepare themselves for their elite roles in society, the curriculum in elite institutions tend to be highly structured, specialized, and rigorous. The levels of qualifications are generally high and standardized although with increasing enrolment they might sometimes be compromised up to a tolerable level. Access to universities under the elite system is meritocratic and the ablest students are admitted, and any relaxing of admission criteria under equity and access programs is not normally expected to undermine the overall standard.

In the mass system, students are equipped with knowledge and skills so that they can build career in different learned professions with the social roles assuming a minor or modest proportion (notably, these two forms of higher education may overlap in terms of their roles and functions). Students are still prepared for elite roles; however, they belong to the “leading strata of all technical and economic organizations of the society. And the emphasis shifts from the shaping of character to the transmission of skills for more specific technical elite roles” (Trow 2005, p. 18). The curriculum in the mass system is more modularized; course sequences are less structured; course combination is less rigid that facilitates easier access, unit credit transfer, and mobility between major fields and even institutions. Academic standards under the mass systems are variable, which means retaining some of the attributes of the elite system. Access under the mass system is generally meritocratic although in certain circumstances, especially in efforts to ensure equality of educational opportunity through compensatory programs, admission criteria are compromised.

In the universal or open access system, students are not trained for any elite roles in society; higher education rather targets the whole population in order to “maximize the adaptability of that population to a society whose chief characteristic is rapid social and technological change” (Trow 2005, p. 18). Courses are presented in modular form, and unstructured instruction and permeable disciplinary boundaries are the system’s curricular

features. Any strict course requirements become less important as the very conception of higher education loses singularity of purpose; assessment and examinations become peripheral along with the “rejection of academic forms, structures, and standards” as life and learning become more integrated (Trow 2005, p. 19). Curricular and learning objectives are more attuned towards gaining experience and life skills which are more important to cope with the complexities of contemporary life than gaining pure academic knowledge. Academic standards are assessed by a “different criterion of achievement: not so much the achievement of some academic standard, but whether there has been any ‘value added’ by virtue of the educational experience (Trow 2005, p. 26). Access is open to everyone who has the minimal education qualifications; and equality of group achievement is targeted through distribution of educational opportunity across the entire population, irrespective of social, ethnic, racial, and class identities. Actually, the move towards mass and universal higher education aims at assimilating tertiary education into the “ordinary life of society” by dismantling the barrier that segregates formal learning from life itself (Trow 2005, p. 46).

Some important aspects of the elite, mass, and universal systems of higher education deserve particular attention with regard to policy formulation for a tiered higher education system in any country, irrespective of its socio-economic status.

In the USA, a highly industrialized country with a most developed economy, these three systems are coexistent without any significant clash of interest. The elite system, along with its meritocratic privileges, exists in the selected research institutes and universities – both public and private. The mass system is functioning well in the state universities having side by side both research postgraduate and postgraduate coursework and undergraduate courses, the latter following the norms and values of a mass system. Even some of the elite institutions do follow mass criteria in delivering their undergraduate courses. And the community colleges are a superb functioning specimen of the universal or open system while many mass institutions have incorporated universal elements. Interestingly, the environment for the mass and universal systems existed in the USA even when the physical expansion needed for introducing these systems was not virtually present. Actually, in a society the need for a differentiated education is always present as the different socio-economic stratifications and their imperatives and exigencies require to be met through different educational arrangements and set-ups. The working as well as the modus operandi of the three tiered systems is marked by their respective characteristic

features, at times overlapping, and any country can make use of them selectively even without corresponding physical and quantitative expansion.

In the case of Bangladesh the higher education system is tiered both in theoretical and practical terms. The system as a whole is elitist as gross enrolment rate is yet to cross the 5 percent mark (some statistics tend to put it at 7 percent). Besides, in terms of selectivity of admission it has some elite institutions such as Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Dhaka University, etc. Side by side it has a mass system consisting of the less selective public universities and colleges that offer Masters and Honours courses; all the public and non-government colleges that offer Pass courses fall under the universal or open system. These differential course offerings require differentiated course requirements and objectives to meet the exigencies of the country. While Bangladesh is different from the USA in many respects, in terms of their educational needs and course provisions they seem to share some common ground. The college system that offers Pass level qualifications resembles, to a greater extent, the US community college system, in theory at least. This explains how Bangladesh can benefit from the US community college system by modifying its structure and course offerings such as making the curriculum more life and service oriented and by minimizing the chasm between the institutions and their environs. All this offers us a framework for transfer of educational experiences from one country to another. Even the poor countries can selectively benefit from the experiences of the rich ones. Besides, some educational provisions transcend national frontiers and can be of mutual benefit to both rich and poor nations. This is one reason why the rich nations of the world with highly developed education systems draw millions of students from the impoverished nations with less developed educational provisions. Above all, the educational experiences of the tiered system as articulated in the western context can be emulated in Bangladesh to develop educational provisions through curriculum innovations that befit the local exigencies. Especially the US universal system, represented through the community colleges and their curricular and pedagogical practices, may suit the Bangladesh context better as in the latter higher education's expansion is more quantitative and informed more by popular demand than by intellectual needs. Besides, the Pass system in Bangladesh can follow the curriculums of the US community college system as students of the former are not equipped with superior intellectual and cognitive abilities that the mass and elite systems demand of their students.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

As evident, this introductory Chapter presents the topic of this thesis; it prepares the setting of the project and outlines its significance as a research endeavour in Bangladesh context as well as in a wider milieu. To facilitate reader's comprehension and follow-up of events, it presents a synopsis of the topic to be researched. Also, it dwells on the thesis' thematic shape and contour, and above all how the topic will be approached and treated in a systematic way to reach a plausible outcome.

More importantly, this Chapter, by way of outlining the background to the study and the research problem, brings together important scholarly views expressed by critics and scholars most of whom are well-versed in higher education in Bangladesh. These researchers and scholars, having firsthand knowledge of the issue under scrutiny, give us an authentic picture of the higher education sector in Bangladesh. Although presented in a synoptic and fragmented form, their views are wide-ranging and look at the issue of relevance of humanities education from different perspectives in the context of the reality of Bangladesh and its higher education needs. While their views on the problem of relevance are intended to identify the research question, they, in their own right, collectively form a body of research. They shed enough light on the current state of higher education in Bangladesh and bring to the fore the magnitude of the problem of relevance which will be dealt with in the forthcoming Chapters. This Chapter, having the problem of relevance delineated and the research question identified, paves the way to exploring the issue of relevance more extensively. As part of the research problem's further elaboration, the next Chapter will deal with the body of core knowledge pertaining to the issue of relevance in its historical, theoretical, and epistemological perspectives.

# Chapter 2

## **The Core Readings: Situating the Topic in Historical, Theoretical and Epistemological Contexts**

This Chapter will critique the relevant readings in order to demonstrate how the issue of ‘relevance’ of higher education in general and humanities education in particular has been dealt with in historical, theoretical, and epistemological perspectives. It will explore the state of scholarship in the higher education sector in order to posit the issue of relevance of the humanities within the wider thematic structure of the thesis – what we know about the issue of relevance, what scholarly pursuits relevant to this issue have been accomplished, how such scholarly endeavours can effectively be explored to improve the relevance of the humanities, and what shape the thesis will assume in the light of new developments in the field.

The Chapter comprises three sections, and the first segment aims at eliciting how the issue of the relevance of higher education has taken its shape historically since the time of antiquity; how higher education has reacted to different socio-political, intellectual, cultural, and economic situations in response to the expectations, aspirations as well as exigencies of the time. The second part strives to bring to the fore different theoretical shapes or contours higher education has assumed over the ages. Also, the question of relevance has taken a new dimension in the wake of the emergence of knowledge economy and new modes of knowledge production and dissemination, and the last section takes into account how such paradigmatic developments in epistemological line have influenced the relevance of the humanities in the higher education sector.

## 2.1 Relevance of higher education in historical perspectives

In the twentieth century, the image of the university as an ivory tower, existing as an island of scholarly privilege beyond the bounds of political, economic and social reality, is, indubitably, no longer tenable (Patterson 1997, p. 231).

Quintessentially a social institution, the university derives its life forces as well as motivation to exist and function from the society where it exists. It cannot remain impervious to socio-political, cultural, religious and economic forces, and it moulds its structural, organisational, operational and intellectual entities in conformity with the forces, events and developments it witnesses or confronts in the course of its existence. It has entered the twenty-first century as a new-look institution with mass participation and burgeoning student population representing varied socio-economic backgrounds, and it is required to prove its relevance or respond to the new intellectual, socio-political and techno-economic orders characterized by rampant utilitarianism, free-market economy, globalisation, a knowledge-based society, and other existing as well as emerging socio-economic exigencies.

In fact, the question of the relevance of higher education has been a longstanding and controversial one. Scholars, academics, and policymakers are divided over whether it should be put to tangible use or should it be valued for its own sake or for mere abstractions. Although many historians consider the early universities or similar institutions of higher education no more than debating society for unworldly theological ‘quibbles’ or abstractions of philosophy, or ‘droning’ on about Aristotle, Pedersen (1997, p. X; also, Patterson 1997; Grendler 2004) debunks such notions and asserts that universities have performed pragmatic utilitarian roles since their very inception. Their findings further confirm that these institutions were rather organised structures and existed in fulfilment of the pressing social needs of the time; they consistently reacted as well as responded to the contemporary socio-political and economic circumstances. Historically, knowledge acquired through intellectual rigors either in modern institutional set-ups or in Hindu *Ashrams* in ancient India or in Plato’s Academy, Socrates’ dialectical teaching or Aristotle’s Lyceum or in the Museum of Alexandria was intended to be put, in one way or other, to some useful purposes. Such purposes range from mere intellectual satisfaction to the exclusive utilitarian motive of the present age.

### **2.1.1 The time of antiquity**

In historical perspectives, the ancient Chinese higher education system was directly geared to practical involvement in community affairs as well as to the benefits of people's political and social life. As early as 1500 BC, knowledge was known to have been used for administrative purposes, and "examinations for entry to the civil service led to the development of adult teaching in literature, with an emphasis on Chinese Poetry" (Patterson 1997, p. 15; also, Knowles 1977, p. 2020).

The ancient Greek education system consisting mainly of ethics, economics, logic, politics, rhetoric, philosophy, metaphysics, mathematics, religion, linguistics, politics, and speculative science was ostensibly utilitarian. The objective was to inculcate truth and moral goodness as well as to satisfy the material needs of society (Frjhoff 1992, p. 43); to prepare future statesmen with necessary training in oratory, statesmanship and administrative skills "relevant to the moral purpose and political aims of Athenian democracy" (Patterson 1997, p. 17; also, Pedersen 1997, p. 12; Knowles 1977, p. 2021). Paideia, a form of higher education considered equivalent to modern humanistic education, aimed at developing superior intellectual, artistic, literary, linguistic, philosophic, computational, and physical attributes and skills through such subjects as reading, writing, arithmetic, literature, and philosophy (Pedersen 1997, p. 7; also, Spies 2000; McClay 2008; Phamotse & Kissack 2008). In this regard, Spies (2000) articulates five cardinal features of higher education in ancient Greece: preparing students for the professions; equipping them with leadership and managerial skills; developing ethical behaviour; promoting aesthetics or the quest for beauty; practicing and propagating philosophic truth through enquiry and research.

### **2.1.2 Hellenistic Greece and Rome**

Higher education in the Hellenistic Age, mainly consisting of such subjects as philosophy, music, literature, rhetoric, would take different forms according to the nature of the vocations; and training and instruction – intellectual, mental and martial – were provided by the state to prepare young people for the responsibilities of active adult life (Patterson 1997, p. 18). The humanities as a broader field were used in ancient Rome to educate the members of a free polity to become active and responsible citizens (Arndt 2007). The Roman higher education system was mainly dominated by rhetoric; and in fact, Roman rhetoric was different from traditional rhetoric in that it was utilitarian in nature. Although

primarily based in its abstraction on Greek intellectual tradition as well as on Aristotelian logic, its emphasis on practical utility was its marked difference (Patterson 1997, p. 22; also, Knowles 1977, p. 2023; Pedersen 1997, p. 21). According to Arndt, (2007, p. 5) it “was not primarily studied theoretically; it was studied through practical exercises aimed at training future clergymen, lawyers, politicians, and citizens.” Therefore, the schools that used to teach rhetoric in Roman Empire were the sources of active and shrewd minds needed for the empire’s higher administrative and government posts. The vocational nature of the training in rhetoric was also useful for the legal practitioners who used to work as advocates and jurists.

### **2.1.3 The Middle Ages**

Higher education emerged in the Middle Ages in order to cater for knowledge and literacy which were in demand to manage as well as control a growing intricate economy (Kunstler 2006). The medieval universities, as Cobban (1992) puts it, were rooted in utilitarian soil; they were born to harness knowledge to the professional needs of an urbanised society that required learned priests, trained administrators, lawyers, and business clerks. Liberal undergraduate university courses were geared to produce secretaries, notaries, and chancery officials (Scott 2006). Alongside meeting the urbanised community’s vocational demand, the medieval universities were also promoting knowledge for its own sake. Scholars, theologians, logicians, legal theorists, philosophers, and natural scientists are known to have dedicated themselves to areas of scholarship irrespective of contemporary utilitarian values.

However, the revival of purely non-utilitarian humanistic disciplines could not hold ground owing to utilitarian pressure from such courses as logic, law, and rhetoric. Towards the end of the twelfth century and in the thirteen century ‘superficial’ humanistic knowledge consisting of literature, literary studies, had “quite disappeared. Toward 1250 ... Logic has the students, Whereas Grammar is reduced in numbers” (Haskins 1923, pp. 40-41; also, McClay 2008). Philosophy was relegated from the apex of intellectual achievement to an ancillary position due to the rising importance of theology, whose origin was in the revelation of the holy books (Phamotse & Kissack 2008).

And the fact that utilitarian courses had their heydays at this time points to higher education’s practical orientation and importance. While classics and literature had to struggle to retain their currency, professional scribes and letter writers were in greater

demand. By the thirteenth century courses on letter writing and composition of official deeds and acts were offered in numerous institutions and chanceries, and professors were in short supply to teach this “valuable art. ... they advertised their wares in a way that has been compared to the claims of a modern business course – short and practical, with no time wasted on outgrown classical authors but everything fresh and snappy and up-to-date, ready to be applied the same day if need be!” (Haskins 1923, pp. 43-44). Thus even arts degrees needed to have some vocational slants and students were trained how to write effectively official letters and correspondences or to make practical application of studies in rhetoric. Also, the university acted as a teacher training institute with an emphasis on reorienting academic knowledge to teaching.

#### **2.1.4 Renaissance humanism, enlightenment, industrial revolution and the emergence of nation-states**

The Renaissance universities, essentially the centres of advanced education including research on theology, medicine, law, were geared to impart humanistic education in philosophy, literature alongside professional education. Especially, the northern European universities emphasized arts and humanities education. Alongside intellectual quest students also attended universities for qualifications or to gain employable skills [such as training in scholarly analysis, the ability to think carefully, and applying analytical reason to a problem] that they would need to build dignified careers in society (Grendler 2004).

During the Reformation humanism reinforced the diminishing of the church’s authority, and the tussle between medieval scholasticism dominated by Christian knowledge and the allied pedagogy and the rise of classical humanism shaped Europe’s higher education along a utilitarian line. The same antagonism facilitated the advent of liberal or humanities education with philosophy on the forefront of the emerging intellectual tradition in the early modern or modern worlds. Philosophy’s epistemological challenge to theological knowledge as well as the perceived detachment of the latter from the common concern of the populace both in spiritual and worldly utilitarian considerations gave rise to universities for students from affluent families who wanted to build careers in business, commerce, politics, and the military. These new institutions represented humanistic ideals and contributed to evolving liberal education that stressed a new curriculum based on the study of literature, the classics, history, and philosophy (Frijhoff 1996; Rothblatt 1993; Grafton & Jardine 1986; Phamotse & Kissack 2008; Arndt 2007; Spies 2000).

Also, following The Enlightenment movement with its emphasis on reason and critical rationalism as well as the scientific revolution, higher education took more utilitarian turn with a greater emphasis on individual and social consideration. As Scott (1984) argues, thus the complex and intricate character of knowledge and the demands of an industrialising society and similar developments necessitated more rigorous scientific method as well as a new kind of objective knowledge that would have application value in the context of a more intellectualised society. As Spies rightly points out in this regard: “Educational development during the Industrial Age again reflected the evolving perspectives and needs of the times” (Spies 2000, p. 24).

With the rise of the nation-state, the universities assumed a more national character, and their social as well as utilitarian roles underwent transformation. Also, their professional structure went through a transformation, and a growing number of students started attending universities “for a variety of secular callings, in particular, service to the government; for learning for its own sake, or for social mobility” (Patterson 1997, p. 114). In the changed circumstances, the national governments required trained officials and administrators; the emerging Protestant faiths needed well-educated clergymen; Protestantism also required a literate population, so people could read the Bible unmediated by priests; university-trained school teachers were in increasing demand; students in growing numbers sought higher education to prepare themselves for gainful careers in politics and business.

### **2.1.5 The modern and postmodern periods**

As an institution the university emerged from the 19th century in order to respond to the pressures put on it by more complex socio-political and economic factors. Apart from the advancement of science and technology, the growth of democracy and emergence of a secular social and political system that followed the industrial revolution and the French Revolution changed Europe’s socio-economic structure. The university as a social institution responded to such changes and it essentially oriented itself towards accomplishing its utilitarian responsibilities. The universities engaged themselves in research and major curriculum overhauls were initiated as part of their increasing socio-economic concerns and changed mission. This was a time when many of the professions made their way into the university. In France, for example, instead of emerging as

universities, the institutions of higher education emerged as specialised institutes whose primary purpose was to train students as specific professionals such as teachers, engineers, archivists, linguists (Patterson 1997, p. 159).

At the start of the 20th century English and other European universities embraced a utilitarian education. However, although the trend was towards useful knowledge or skills which students could acquire through vocational education, Britain's much-valued Robbins Committee report of 1963 recognised knowledge for its own sake. This report that equally recognised the need for the creation of knowledge through research and its dissemination through teaching clearly envisioned the future of the British higher education system. As Patterson (1997, p. 224) puts it, the report, along with an emphasis on vocational fields, laid stress on the advancement in learning, production of "cultivated men and women", and the "transmission of a common culture and common standards of scholarship."

Due to further expansion of the professions following the Second World War different and new professions emerged and entered the academy, which in turn contributed to massive expansion of the higher education sector in a utilitarian line. In the backdrop of such polarization to utilitarianism, a new type of higher education devoted to serving the global economy and individuals rather than the nation-state has already emerged, and the University of Phoenix, a private for-profit university, is "the clearest example of this new type of university" (Ford 2002, p. 30). It suits the exigencies of time and is organized around the idea of globalism. Its main function, as laid out by its philosophy of maximizing economic benefit, is to "impart useful skills and knowledge to its 'customers'—the term it prefers to 'students'—in the most cost-effective manner" (Ford 2002, 34). It has ostensibly moved from the traditional idea of the university and incorporated the mission of a business organization serving the "economic interest of its student-consumers, its industry employers, and its investors. One highly controversial impact of such a market-driven transition with greater emphasis on job creation is that "academic programs geared to the job market are expanding while programs in the humanities languish" (ibid). Its curriculum manifestly excludes literature, philosophy, politics, pure sciences, so knowledge for its own sake or service to the nation state or its public is conspicuously absent. Many secular as well as ecclesiastical institutions, as part of their survival strategies, have also succumbed to the pressure of the time and incorporated courses that are market-driven. It is now a widely-held view that students come to the university to learn skills that are in demand in the job market or that can be

readily converted into financial reward.

Also, Ford (2002) envisions new roles for the future university which he calls postmodern university. It will have a potentially serious role in order to save the planet from environmental degradation, socio-economic dislocation due to reckless capitalism, euphemistically called economism, weakened identity or lack of rootedness arising out of atomistic individualism and too frequent population mobility precluding traditional settled life. Pitted against the modern university, the future university will have a different curriculum as well as institutional settings that will suit its educational and academic objectives. The curriculum will be change-oriented, localised or place-based, problem-focused, openly value oriented, broadly utilitarian, “biocentric and social”, sympathetic to democratic values, resistant to socio-cultural dislocation or ‘rootlessness’ in the name of progress in its narrower sense (Ford, p. 97). As well as it will spurn narrow disciplinary dispensation and vocationalism. Such a holistic higher education, neither too abstract (that excludes socio-economic importance of higher education) nor too narrowly vocational (that precludes pure cultural, intellectual, and contemplative aspects of higher education), will provide an education that is not constricted by specific ends; it is entrepreneurial, technically proficient and ethically sensitive (Hinchcliff 2006; also, Kunstler 2006; Snyder 2006). In the same vein, Hinchcliff (2006, p. 83) makes prognosis of an emergent university to be called “post-industrial university” that will impart an education that is future oriented, “altruistic, creative”, and target “our well-being” through an “empowering pedagogy”. It will act as a “critic and conscience of society”; its paramount objective should be solution to problems spawned by technology that has, in the words of Einstein, “exceeded humanity” (Hinchcliff 2006, p.82).

### **2.1.6 Socio-cultural and intellectual roles of the humanities**

Historically, universities are known to have performed purely intellectual and cultural responsibilities, too, and Scott (1984, p. 31) explores the emergence as well as usefulness of ‘ideal’ liberal universities (for example, Scottish universities of the 1780s - 1820s) that quintessentially existed in the “late eighteenth to the first half of the twentieth century ... with their Augustan style and intellectual preoccupations with philosophy and political economy.” Such universities (and similar contemporary universities, especially the elite ones, that had a special focus on the humanities) performed one, among others, important role – they acted as the “custodianship of an intellectual tradition” (ibid), both humanistic

and scientific. They helped form elites through transmission of cultural capital or knowledge that had its root in such culturally orientated disciplines as philosophy, history, and English.

More importantly, as Scott (1984) further argues, the humanities disciplines, having the ability to transcend disciplinary boundaries and specialization, accomplished an integrative role providing an overarching intellectual context for human existence. The liberal university, being a pluralist one, strove to “integrate and incorporate knowledge rather than simply to advance knowledge on a narrow front” (ibid). Notably, in the early days of liberal education philosophy acted as an integrative discipline; it lost its ground to history because of its too much preoccupation with pedagogy and abstraction, but not with knowledge. No sooner had history started going along philosophy’s way and gave up its mission of cultivating knowledge than it began losing its edge. After the World War II, English, with its “commitment to sensibility and subjectivity” and convenient location “between intellectual and aesthetic life” (ibid, p. 32), came to the forefront of liberal disciplines as an integrative discipline.

The humanities and their practitioners helped secularize European universities as well as effect socio-political and cultural transformation. With the growth of literary and cultural activities, humanism and humanistic disciplines gained momentum in European universities. The humanists took greater interest in the study of the works of ancient Greek and Roman writers. With their commitment to the individual, free will, and human values, the humanists, according to Scott (2006), aimed at the well-rounded development of students through liberal education. Based on Italian Renaissance and humanism secularised higher education helped to produce the scientific revolution of the 17th century as well as the Enlightenment movement of the 18th. Besides, it helped set up in the Renaissance universities the foundation of research mission, which the German universities replicated later.

Notably, the German model of teaching and research universities acknowledged the centrality of the arts and sciences, and this raised the academic status of the traditional humanistic disciplines to the same level as the theology, law, and medicine faculties. At German research universities, the humanities disciplines gained prominence in the areas of philosophy, philology, and allied areas such as Romance philology, comparative philology, Germanic studies, and Egyptology. History and historical methods made significant

headways in the domain of scholarship as well. Also, as Scott (Scott 1984) puts it, such historical studies had a cementing influence on unifying the German nation.

In the USA, higher education, as demonstrated through such church-based institutions as Harvard University [1636], Columbia University [1754], Eureka College [1855], Hendrix College [1876], initially took its root to serve people's religious and ecclesiastical needs. In the early republican colleges, the curriculum was, in line with European tradition, mainly dominated by liberal arts as "a liberal education was believed to be well-rounded preparation for the individual student in a democracy" (Scott 2006, p. 16). Later it was geared to meet the socio-political and cultural needs of a democratic nation. As Scott (2006, p. 13) further elaborates, "Democratization, or service to the individual of the nation-state, was the inherent mission of American higher education throughout the 19th century. This mission was later to be embodied in the formal public service mission of the 20th and 21st centuries." It was in keeping with their service missions at the formative stage, and modern American university's democratization and public service mission, shaped by the spirit of the American revolution, is the natural expansion of their formative mission. Although the passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act in 1862 (a landmark legislation that paved the way for founding universities to meet the utilitarian and vocational needs of the populace) signalled a shift in US higher education towards a utilitarian, skill-based vocational and technological education, it categorically underscored the necessity, alongside scientific and professional education, for intellectual enrichment through classical studies (Ford 2002, p. 29).

### **2.1.7. Commentary**

The above is neither a chronological nor a holistic treatment of the history of higher education. The treatment, mainly 'phenotypical' in nature, deals with the 'conditions' that have historically influenced "human competencies and society's need for educational services over the ages" (Spies, 2000, p. 19); and it attempts to identify some trends – academic, intellectual, socio-cultural, economic, utilitarian – that have loosely been subsumed under different disciplinary, pedagogic and institutional arrangements in different phases of history, and in this vein it selectively deals with the relevance of humanities higher education in its wider facets and perspectives.

What transpires from the above deliberation is that knowledge is always useful and in demand in any society and higher education as a whole has fulfilled some sort of utilitarian purposes since the earliest days of its inception. Knowledge is both abstract and concrete or skill-based. While certain types of knowledge have direct utility or tangible value, there is another category of intangible knowledge that aims at the development of the mind, body, and intellect. Also, knowledge has ethico-moral, religio-political, socio-cultural and aesthetic and spiritual dimensions. While abstract or philosophical knowledge is geared to bring about mental and intellectual elevation, the technological, engineering, scientific, and other profession oriented courses such as medicine, law, business were geared to bring about socio-economic uplift. In the current socio-economic and political gamut when demand for knowledge of the practical and career oriented utilitarian disciplines is on the rise phenomenally, the traditional arrangements and permutations have been disturbed and knowledge of the humanities and similar abstract and theoretical disciplines has lost the edge in the employment market. Therefore, the pertinent question is: how far the humanities, without ready or direct utility, can reconfigure and position themselves to prepare their graduates for the employment market. While on policy terms (the Morrill Land Grant Act, the Robbins Commission, for example) it has been articulated that the humanities are equally important alongside profession-oriented courses, in reality no such policy documents have charted ways as to how the humanities remain useful in a market-driven economy or fiercely profession-oriented job market. Looking at how historically the employment sector has behaved, how different disciplines have acted or reacted in different ages to the needs of the time, and how higher education adjusted itself to the exigencies of time in keeping with different stakeholders' demands and aspirations, we should be able to establish a pattern or trends that will help reposition the humanities in the current socio-economic context.

In the above context, what Arndt (2007, p.5) articulates is quite pertinent: in historical perspective the humanities higher education had “a political dimension, an ethical dimension, a vocational dimension, and a spiritual dimension.” Their political dimension meant it was to “give students the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in politics, to take part in political deliberation” while the ethical aspect dealt with society's different cultural, social, political, and religious ethos (ibid); their vocational dimension targeted training students for clerical, legal, and political duties as professionals in society and the spiritual dimension was to “guide students toward the highest possibilities of human existence” (ibid). To these, we may add two more dimensions – intellectual and aesthetic.

A close examination of the above treatment of the history of higher education reveals that the humanities performed as well as fulfilled objectives and responsibilities that may be tentatively categorized under the above dimensions. They prepared students for professional responsibilities as teachers, lawyers, theologians, administrators, orators, writers, clerks, managers required for smooth functioning of various social institutions. They trained people in the elevation of their intellect, power of reasoning, sharpness of mind, broadening of the knowledge sphere as well as mental and intellectual horizon. They prepared citizens for the working of democracy, to act as responsible and moral beings. They were an important means or agent of social mobility; also they acted towards creating an egalitarian society by balancing social and class stratification. In this case, the humanities to which access is relatively easy had a greater social and moral role; they helped establish the moral and intellectual tone and parameters of society. Humanistic education contributed to the growth of literacy, literary culture, cultural and creative activities, growth of vernacular languages, secularization of society through progressive socio-political movements and transformation. Also, the humanities played a role in the promotion of a common culture, national unification and integration; acted as a custodian of national culture and tradition. Above all, they were instrumental in expanding the knowledge and intellectual foundation of people at national and individual levels.

As to the relationship between higher education and the job market, it is observed that higher education, in conformity with the Chapter's line of arguments, has adjusted itself to changes that appear to have occurred in keeping with the nature of the challenges different ages have posed. Also, the utility of or demand for a particular discipline is not purely discipline-specific; it is also age-specific and contingent upon specific useful functions a particular discipline is capable of performing at any given era. Therefore, the age, the very nature of society, its socio-economic as well as politico-religious changes and the complexity of such circumstances, which Spies (2000, p. 22) sums up as "value changes, intellectual renewal, and cultural revolutions," determine what objectives, be they pure intellectualism or economism, higher education is required to accomplish. To be specific, higher education serves society not on its own terms but on terms set by the latter according to its express needs and expectations. The humanities, despite being elbowed out due to utilitarian pressure from other disciplines, were in a better situation to perform utilitarian roles in the earlier phases of the history of higher education when society was less complex. However, with the advent of modernity along with all its complexities and subtleties the humanities lost their edge in the employment market while all technology

and purely profession-oriented disciplines had their heydays. Postmodern economism has added business and market-oriented courses to this list of disciplines.

In the current academic set-ups humanities disciplines such as rhetoric or the art of oratory, logic, philosophy, ethics, music, literature may be experiencing downturns in the job market. But, given the utilitarian roles they have accomplished in different phases of history, they seem to have enough relevance as well as tangible values which we can exploit to suit the needs or complexities of the current age and its job market imperatives. Writing and such other language and communication related courses were in high demand at certain phases of history (for example, professional scribes were in great demand in the Middle Ages). Given the current state of poor literacy of students at tertiary levels across all disciplines (the NEC 2003 considers linguistic weaknesses, both in Bengali and English, a serious impediment to Bangladesh university students' desired educational progress; also, Alam 2001), courses on the art of writing, editing (that requires sound grounding in grammar and other linguistic nuances) may be made to assume considerable utilitarian role in the contemporary job market. Also, such allied fields as literature, linguistics that have the potentials for improving literacy and writing skills may help the humanities gain ground in the job market.

Notably, writing or related courses were not practical in nature; however, they were customized through conscious planning so that they could assume practical utility. This means certain humanities courses can be made employable by curriculum innovation. So, the writing courses in the Middle Ages were not simply theoretical; it was rather reconfigured to train students with practical application in mind. Such writing courses were designed to teach how to write official letters and correspondence. In the case of rhetoric, in the Roman empire its teaching mainly aimed at sharpening intellect as well as imparting skills of reasoned arguments or debate which students would need in their professional life in conducting arguments and disputations adroitly. Mainly abstract in nature, rhetoric attained practical utilitarian attributes when it was reconfigured, in accordance with the demand of the time, to serve the legal and administrative needs of the empire.

Historically, university education has always performed a vital role in supplying teachers at different levels of the education system. Generally, education acquires professional as well as tangible stature mainly at tertiary levels which constitute the later phases of the overall education continuum. The early phases of general education, along with numeracy

skills, is literacy based, and it will never be an exaggeration to say that only a humanities education is better-positioned to prepare students with the needed literacy skills. To impart literacy to students at the early phases of the education system, successful language and literacy teachers or instructors are needed. In this regard, the humanities graduates possessing appropriate language as well as teaching skills can enjoy an enviable position in the teaching and related profession at primary and secondary levels.

Pure utilitarianism is only one of the many aspects of higher education, and historically higher education has also been pursued, other than its tangible value, for social mobility, intellectual satisfaction, philosophical abstractions or reflections, mental and intellectual uplift, successful functioning of a democratic society, aesthetic pleasure. Besides, although the humanistic disciplines may not always have tangible values in their own right, they may add indispensable value to different disciplines when they are studied in tandem with other courses. Knowledge, be it skill-based or intellectual, needs to have a holistic approach without which education of any sort remains partial or incomplete, and the humanities disciplines, with their ability to bring about mental and intellectual development, can lend wholeness to the acquisition of knowledge.

As noticed, the humanities disciplines are not always without efficacy, and the fact that they have considerable utility or can be made useful is evident from how at different phases of history they were the stellar disciplines and in greater demand in the job market than any technical or profession-oriented disciplines used to enjoy. What is needed to make the humanities have tangible value in terms of employability is to understand the trends and needs of the time and gear them to that purpose. It is evident from Haskins' and Patterson's argument that in the Middle Ages the arts courses acquired some vocational slants by making room for training in the art of reasoned argument and debate which legal professionals needed in the execution of their duty. Liberal undergraduate courses were also designed in such a way as to prepare students for employment as notaries, secretaries and chancery officials.

As to the relevance of the humanities, we can identify a common pattern, and according to this, the humanities experienced recession in terms of demand at different stages of history when they were unwilling or unable to adjust to the changes job markets underwent in response to socio-economic changes. As for example, classics in the Middle Ages lost their competitiveness in the face of direct utility of such professional courses as law. At the same time logic and rhetoric could remain competitive because of their practical value or

utility. Pure literature in its mere theoretical form did not enjoy any demand in the employment market while professional writing with significant reconfiguration towards job-market needs would enjoy a quite high demand. Similarly, grammar as a pure theoretical subject had little prospect in the job market; however, when it is customized to improve editing and journalistic skills, it is able to assume employment prospect in the current job market. Teaching as a profession was employable as it required reorientation of theoretical knowledge, be it humanities or science based, towards teaching practices.

The current tension between untainted intellectualism represented by the humanities and downright economism pursued by the vocation-oriented fields having direct utility has its precedent in the past. In the late medieval Ages the New Learning based on Renaissance humanism clashed with the purely functional scholastic curriculum. Needless to say, the humanities are needed to maintain a balance in the intellectual arena between intellectualism and economism, and herein lies the quintessential relevance of the humanities. Attempts to strike such a balance were noticed in the eighteenth century France when utilitarianism guided by reason and critical rationalism took root. Such a utilitarian trend was counteracted through a healthy balance prescribed by Rousseau whose notion of utility of higher education consisted in producing responsible individuals able to act judiciously as well as individuals with skills who could perform service to the state. The later German research universities also struck a balance between the humanities and the scientific or technological disciplines by putting almost equal importance on both. The highly acclaimed Robins Committee Report recommended an equilibrium between the humanities and the vocation-oriented disciplines, and iterated the value of humanistic disciplines in the formation of a common culture, creating cultivated human beings, and advancing common scholarship and learning. The Morrill Land Grant Act that fervently promoted a utilitarian curriculum supported an inclusion of the study of classics alongside other useful arts.

Knowledge, in order to be useful in tangible or intangible terms, is required to fulfil some pedagogical, epistemological, doctrinal, and intellectual preconditions. Mere ecclesiastical knowledge is not knowledge at all as it does not fulfil the scientificity, logicity, and rationality factors. Too much abstraction without any touch with reality helps knowledge lose its contextual and tangible value. Knowledge loaded with sheer pedagogical goals and objectives without any conscious efforts to relate it to direct or indirect useful purposes, either intellectual or utilitarian, will not be able to exist in a world that is always in a flux.

In historical hindsight, scholasticism lost its appeal because of its pure pedagogical rigidity and rigour; theological knowledge lost its importance due to its failure to withstand philosophy's superior epistemological challenge; it also suffered from contextual irrelevance when it detached itself from society's common concern; even philosophy and history had to succumb to pressures exerted by literature when the former became too much preoccupied with pedagogy and abstraction. On the other hand, literature was able to gain strength because of its commitment to sensibility and subjectivity. What becomes evident here is that in order for the humanities to remain relevant in current context, it is imperative that they fulfil certain preconditions – they need to be epistemologically sound; they are to shun abstraction and remain in touch with the common concern of society and its varied needs.

Historically, the humanities have performed very crucial roles in bringing about socio-economic and political transformation in society. As already noted, based on individualism and human values the Renaissance humanism in Italy set the stage for liberal education; it helped bring about significant cataclysmic changes in society. Also, it secularized higher education, heralded university's research mission which German universities replicated; was instrumental in initiating the industrial revolution as well as the Enlightenment movement through secularization and rationalization of people's socio-political and religio-economic views. Historical scholarship in German universities was also the guiding force behind German national unification. Given such historical roles the humanities and other allied disciplines have performed, it is safe to say that the humanities have considerable relevance.

The universities of the type of Phoenix are stated to be skill-based and geared to produce (not create or transmit) knowledge that has tangible economic value in terms of creating ready employment prospects for which student-customers pay hefty fees; as well as this type of knowledge is principally geared to the demands of specific industries or organizations. As the humanities are not able to serve any material interest, they are either excluded from or grossly neglected by such private for-profit institutions of higher studies. By excluding the humanities from their curriculums, the for-profit universities are going for a truncated education, and this is rightly pointed out by Kunstler (2006, p. 66): "Narrow, cost-efficient career-oriented professional training programs simply cannot meet the demands of twenty-first century society on all but the narrowest terms." Although these private for-profit universities are stated to be the natural outgrowth of higher education

institutions that have traditionally reacted to the pressure of the time, their too much polarization towards economic interest belies university's ennobling missions. They categorically discount the innate values universities have nurtured for centuries through promoting an education that is able to bring about individuals' moral, intellectual, and cultural elevation.

However, in order to stay relevant in an age that demands of higher education to possess tangible value, the humanities may selectively benefit from the trends set by the for-profit universities. As for-profit universities emphasize applications of knowledge, other non-profit universities may replicate their model in terms of how knowledge is produced with application in sight. While unbridled economism for the sake of maximizing monetary gain is against the ethos of the humanistic disciplines, professional success that requires knowledge to have some application value should not be considered unethical. Rather economic gain as a by-product of professional success requires to be encouraged at a tolerable level. Instead of leaving the humanities to 'languish' at a time when knowledge needs to have application value, the humanists can adjust the production of knowledge by adopting the means and strategy of how disciplinary knowledge with application value is produced at for-profit universities. Besides, the mission of the for-profit universities appears to be a misplaced or distorted one. While internationalism or globalism in terms of world peace, humanitarian needs, the humanity at large, cultural understanding and exchange can bring about or ensure progress and prosperity, the emphasis on pure economism is based on a more constricted vision. Universities, be they for-profit or non-profit, can serve the broader interest of humanity by adopting internationalism in its wider and truer perspectives. As Scott (2006, p. 32) maintains, "Internationalization [service to the body of nation-states] is potentially the new social mission that arrests the transformation of higher education into just another knowledge industry." Readings (1996) sees in the ruins of the university that has become a transnational corporation a great reservoir of freedom with regard to international communication of ideas and ethical thought. Scott (2006) further mentions that many American universities such as George Washington University, University of Michigan, Pennsylvania State University, Boston College have already incorporated internationalism in their mission statements. Also, there is a growing tendency to internationalise the curriculum on the basis of multiculturalism and global education mission (ibid). Many universities have already integrated into their programs such humanities courses as area studies, peace studies, either in independent or interdisciplinary modes with a focus on global understanding.

While the humanities appear to be in retreat in the face of many-pronged onslaught by too much career- or application-oriented disciplines, Ford's vision of a future university based on a 'worldview' incorporating moral, humanitarian, and environmental concerns may help resurrect the humanities and restore them to a more venerable position. The postmodern university will have a holistic curriculum aimed at enhancing the cause of human welfare, and it will need to rely on the humanities disciplines to materialize its avowed objectives. Hinchcliff's post-industrial university awards the humanities more serious roles to save humanity from extinction. Although it sounds too idealistic, the humanities, with their ennobling ability, may help us understand our existence in its mechanistic as well as existential perspectives. Our existence in this world does not simply mean material progress and happiness; it is rather a subtle interaction between the obvious and the mysterious; between what we know and what we will never know. As well as life is not simply about biological or physiological mechanism and interaction; it has its mental, emotional, and psychological elements whose un-fulfilment can destabilize our natural way of life. The humanities, with their altruistic attributes, will fulfil our emotional needs; as well as they will help humanize us by instilling in us sanity and sobriety without which our quest for sheer material progress will lose its way in the technological maze. While the sciences, technological fields, and business disciplines will keep contributing to material and economic wellbeing, the humanities will help counteract or reverse the detrimental effects the former will have on humanity. Such functions the humanities are expected to accomplish may not have tangible value; however, given humanity's turbulent past and the current disjunctions and dislocations unbridled scientific progress has already created, the roles Ford and Hinchcliff contemplate about have real merits which we can ignore only at the cost of our future as well as that of our posterity. What McClay (2008, p.39) says in this regard is noteworthy: "If the humanities are the study of human things in human ways, then it follows that they function in culture as a kind of corrective or regulative mechanism, forcing upon our attention those features of our complex humanity that the given age may be neglecting or missing."

## **2.2 Theoretical underpinnings**

This Section will attempt to locate the relevance of humanities higher education in its theoretical perspectives. At the same time it will examine the theoretical contours higher education has taken at different times of its modern history. I have chosen five theorists of higher education – Newman, Flexner, Whitehead, Gasset, Jaspers, and Kerr. The reasons

for such a selection are varied – their stature as educational theorists and thinkers, their differential treatments of the topic of higher education that has undergone gradual evolution in the course of its modern history, and their presence at different stages of history. Newman, the idealist, undoubtedly the unrivalled theorist of liberal or humanities education, stands at the beginning of the higher education theorizing continuum while Kerr, the pragmatist, seats at its end. Also, these two theorists represent the opposing poles of the liberal-pragmatic divide of higher education. Flexner, Gasset, and Jaspers, the syncretists, stand in-between and their treatment of the topic shows how different conflicting views have been synthesized. Whitehead, a proponent of utilitarianism in higher education, deals with the issue of how higher education is expected to perform purely utilitarian roles at the cost of its cardinal objectives. While theoretical consideration is the Section’s prime objective, a critical appraisal of these diverse views as well as their synthesis brings to the fore the roles or relevance of the humanities in the current context.

### **2.2.1 Cardinal John Henry Newman**

Cardinal Newman demarcates a clear-cut dividing line between liberal or philosophical knowledge and useful or mechanical knowledge. Liberal knowledge, as he theorises, is what is innate and inner, and it deals with the exercise of the mind, reason, reflection, and intellect. It is a stringent exercise of the mind; “an acquired illumination ... an inward endowment” (Newman 1960, P. 85). It has no direct utility or has nothing to do with training and instruction in which learners learn skills or commit things to memory. It is useful in itself; its usefulness lies in its being something noble; it makes “the gentleman. It is well to be a gentleman, it is well to have a cultivated intellect, delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind ... ” (ibid. 86). As well as Newman looks at knowledge from a holistic perspective; and according to him, all branches of knowledge are intimately connected and have multiplied bearings. They are complementary in character and “complete, correct, balance each other” (ibid, p. 74).

Intellectual excellence or nurturing of the intellect apart, another vital attribute of liberal education, according to Newman, is its ability to appeal to human aesthetic sense or sense of beauty. It encompasses all facets of beauty – moral beauty, physical beauty, beauty of perfection of the intellect, poetic beauty, artistic beauty, spiritual beauty. Like any work or act of beauty it satiates the human aesthetic sense. It is able to “open the mind; to correct it, to refine it ...” (ibid, P. 92). Beauty expressed through art is its object, and like beauty it

does not go beyond itself.

Education, as Newman argues, can be made useful in two ways – at individual and social levels. At the individual level liberal education empowers those who acquire it with the prowess of intellectuality, or what Newman calls, a ‘culture of intellect’. It equips them with both social and intellectual qualifications and skills needed to free themselves from oppression and deprivation imposed by social neglect and exploitation. It sharpens and illuminates human intellect, outlook and vision and acts as a cure for “intellectual infirmities”; it brings out “the talent of philosophical speculation”, and leads “the mind forward to eminence in this or that intellectual department” (Newman 1960, pp. XLIII-XLIV). Also, it equips practical-minded people such as politicians and statesmen with firmness of the mind as well as vast and versatile intellect.

The second benefit accrues from a collective civic and social context, and in this sense higher education prepares students to assume social responsibility. It aims at improving the intellectual contour of society through the development or cultivation of the public mind. Also, it nourishes individuals in society through the creation of “those free and independent tastes and virtues which come in to sustain the common relations of society, and raise the individual in them” (ibid, P. 129). In the same vein Newman further extends the role of liberal education to the service of humankind: liberal higher education, through the inculcation of human values, posits human beings in the world at large and prepares them for wider humanitarian responsibilities. As well as Newman promotes scientific knowledge (not technical knowledge) that can bring about the greater good and wellbeing of humanity.

Newman seems to acknowledge to some extent the utilitarian view of higher education. However, his definition of utility is different from what the advocates of vocational education understand by the term ‘usefulness’. What is useful to the proponents of utilitarianism in higher education, to Newman the same bears the meaning ‘good’; what is good is always useful, though what is useful is not always good. Liberal education being good is useful as well. Again, Newman’s emphasis is on its being useful in itself. It is not useful in the way professional education is useful. A man of liberal education possesses more sophisticated intellectual and reasoning power which makes him superior to those who lack intellectual height. In this specific sense, “mental culture is emphatically useful” (ibid, P. 125).

In fact, the core of higher education is liberal knowledge, and professional education by its inherent or hidden philosophic undertone can gain the property of liberal education. In this regard, Newman attempts to refine the nature of vocational or professional education to suit his definition of liberal education. As he views it, professional education has an inherent philosophy, too, which resembles that of liberal education. In his view when the professionals are outside their university, they are seen as persons confined to their narrow professional identity; however, when they are inside their university, they remain immersed in the realm of knowledge. The world they find themselves ensconced in is a world of knowledge which can be attained through liberal education. So, their sciences, when seen from the perspective of liberal knowledge, attain the attributes of liberal education. By instilling this abstract conception of liberal education into professional education, we can, according to Newman, counter the utilitarian notion that “no education is useful which does not teach us some temporal calling, or some mechanical art, or some physical secret” (Newman 1960, P. 126).

### **2.2.1.1. Commentary**

In his defence of Newman’s anti-utilitarian view of higher education, Pelikan (1992, p. 37) advances the argument that “[a]n overemphasis on [useful] ... knowledge ... has made the university sterile ... depriving it ... of the depth dimension that comes from other ways of knowing, especially ways of knowing that would be regarded as instinctive or poetic.” Naturally, imagination and intuition, as opposed to the mechanical, are matters of spontaneity and cannot always be bound by fixed imperatives as well as by utility. The task of a modern university is to redefine the nature of knowledge “not by spurning analysis, intellection, and reasoning, but by applying them, inductively as well as deductively, to new and hitherto unexplored fields” (ibid, p. 39).

Notably, Pelikan’s defence of Newman’s idea of knowledge for its own sake seems to echo what Aristotle says in his *Metaphysics*: “All men by nature desire to know,” and this further leads to the notion that the proclivity to know for its own sake is innately a human characteristic that distinctively lays down the *raison d’être* for university education. Also, Pelikan (1992, p. 32) reminds us of how Newman blends with Arnold in their “love of learning for its own sake.” In fact, Newman, in certain aspects, is ahead of his time in his conception of the idea of higher education. He adds more obvious and more tangible

intellectual dimensions to university education, and the study of arts and philosophy assumes a pivotal position.

Newman, through his vision of a holistic education, underscores, or even foresees, the benefit of looking at knowledge from an eclectic point of view and highlights the efficacy of studying different university subjects in combination with different branches of knowledge. As apparent, the prevailing idea of studying a combination of subjects, inter-disciplinarity, intellectual cooperation and interdependence, exchange of ideas among students and teachers as well as between teachers and students are inherent in his idea of higher education.

Although Newman can be criticized for excluding outright scientific training and technical knowledge from the sphere of higher education, the fact remains that his theory or idea of higher education is the very foundation of modern higher education, and many scholarly pursuits in the university, be they in the fields of commerce, science or engineering, derive their legitimacy and vitality from liberal knowledge. Technical or useful knowledge, just to get recognition as higher knowledge proper must receive the seal of legitimacy or epistemological recognition from liberal knowledge, which Newman calls philosophic acquisition of knowledge. Useful knowledge acquired in conjunction with a philosophic spirit that involves exercise of the intellect as well as intellectual acuity becomes liberal knowledge at least in its spirit. When Newman speaks of liberal knowledge, he speaks of philosophical acquisition of knowledge, and in that sense his idea of higher education retains currency. Also, to Newman, philosophy, in addition to being a separate academic discipline, is the “science of sciences,” and it is charged with the motto of determining or comprehending the mutual impact of one field of knowledge on another or the interrelation with or interdependence of one on another area of study.

Newman’s idea of higher education, in its very spirit and contents, seems to have verily attained universal appeal and recognition. If intellectual cultivation and rigours are considered the main objectives of higher education, his definition of higher education is not likely to lose its timeliness. Differentiated from mechanical knowledge, liberal knowledge demands of its practitioners discipline and rigour that can be achieved by means of mental exercise, reasoning, and philosophical reflection. This definition of liberal knowledge that pits it against mechanical or technical skill still holds true. The very spirit of this definition which emphasizes intellectuality helps promote a genuine

intellectual and scholastic environment in the university, and it is this attribute that saves modern education, especially professional education, from being dehumanized.

Newman's theorization of liberal education appears to have ample academic and theoretical implications: he frees higher education from medieval pedantry or aridity and posits in an academic context accessible to all who have the intellectual ability to pursue it. It values higher education on the basis of academic and intellectual rigours without which it becomes cheap and unworthy of possession. However, his view of higher education is marked by some glaring defects. He fosters a highbrow attitude towards education and excludes vocational education from the purview of higher education. The intellectual rigours and depth his version of higher education demands of students seek to restrict higher education to the select few, and such a restricted prescription hardly fits the current age of mass higher education. Also, it is one-sided or partial as it excludes research and scientific investigation from the university's academic spheres. Above all, its value in practical tangible terms that the changed employment situations demand of any graduates remains highly tenuous. But it will be a partial treatment of the topic if the value of higher education, especially of humanities education, is measured on the basis of tangible outcome or only by its economic or financial output. In order to give proper weight to it both in tangible as well as intangible terms, the relevance of higher education needs to be looked at from a newer perspective and redefined to include social or public, cultural, aesthetic and, above all intellectual values or significance. If the Newmanian notion of liberal or humanities education is valued in these terms, it retains its relevance in all possible facets or dimensions – intellectual, cultural, social, political, and aesthetic.

### **2.2.2. Abraham Flexner**

To Flexner, the university is a place for cultivation of pure scholarship, and its major functions include conservation of knowledge and ideas and their interpretation. Knowledge is both theoretical and practical-oriented, and it assumes, alongside philosophic and intellectual dimensions, scientific stature. At university, scholars evolve theories, analyse and test their veracity; pursue truth and train people to promote it. Also, it stresses on “creative activity, productive and critical inquiry” (Flexner 1967, p. 23); while solutions of socio-political problems are considered important, they remain incidental to preservation and extension of knowledge and other critical and creative endeavours.

The university is an ‘active’ centre of both scientific and humanistic studies, investigation and reflection. Here in conjunction with the quest for scientific knowledge, there is “philosophic intelligence” at work which puts things “in the large, as new material is accumulated” (Flexner 1967, p. 36). Unlike lower or special institutions that train teachers, trainers and government officials, universities are expected to help graduates achieve intellectual independence, a critical, disciplined, and analytical mind well-stored with knowledge.

Flexner is against compromising quality, commercializing as well as lowering the standard of higher education curriculum. He deplores how the utilitarian trend in higher education and knowledge is pushing the humanities and with them human values and humanism to the backstage. He is highly critical of the contemporary American universities that “have ... needlessly cheapened, vulgarised and mechanized themselves” and obsequiously run after “the golden calf of degrees” (Flexner 1967, p. 3). Once venues for practising liberal philosophy, these universities are now managed by powerful trustees and politicians and have become commercial enterprises. Vocational education gains an upper hand while the humanities assume a peripheral status.

In the wake of scientific development, society becomes vulnerable to a myriad of problems, which philosophy and humanities attempt to solve. As Flexner thinks, “Philosophers and critics, therefore, gain in importance as science makes life more complex – more rational in some ways, more irrational in others” (ibid, p.34). The world of humanities, history, philosophy, as Flexner witnesses, is in a state of flux. He finds before him a wider world of limitless possibilities for the humanities still unexplored: “Intensive study of phenomenon under most favorable possible conditions – the phenomena of the physical world, of the social world, of the aesthetic world, and the ceaseless struggle to see things ...” (ibid).

### **2.2.2.1 Commentary**

As it appears, in Flexner’s hand the idea of higher education, as expounded by Newman, undergoes dramatic transformation and finds itself immersed in the realities of society. It frees itself from the constricted sphere of pure self development and individual perfection (such as making a gentleman) and opens up to the wider society and its changing needs and expectations. It attains a more developed and more time-appropriate dimension to become

an agent of social change. Knowledge, hitherto considered its own end, assumes utility in social perspectives and gives way to societal change and development.

In fact, the university Flexner defines and propagates is a mundane institution rooted within the social fabric of a given era. Established, like other social institutions, for the social and intellectual benefits of people as social beings, universities are responsive to changes that occur in the wider society. They are neither historic relics that have exhibit value, nor are they rigid organizations impervious to the needs of the society and its inmates and institutions. They represent the expectations and aspirations of the age, and are quite responsive to present and future needs. Although Flexner's preoccupations are more with abstractions, he places universities within a tangible world and its physical, social, intellectual, and aesthetic realities. He advocates, in a utilitarian line, scientific knowledge that brings about material prosperity at least at a tolerable level.

Flexner is optimistic about the constructive social role the humanities can play in the problem-ridden world in which science and technology have an all-pervasive role, at times catastrophically ominous. In a tense and unstable world science and scientific inventions and discoveries very often, perceptibly or imperceptibly, create problems, and in this regard Flexner assigns a praiseworthy role to the humanities and philosophy which are otherwise neglected in the academic world dominated by commerce and utilitarianism. He believes these non-utilitarian branches of knowledge with their humanising and civilising power can help get rid of problems science and its indiscriminate use often create. Notably, this is how Flexner defends the need for humanities and social science in the intellectual sphere, and at the same time he reinvents a new role for these branches of knowledge, which is not purely utilitarian in its disposition.

Also, Flexner's views *vis-a-vis* continued decline in the study of humanities in universities bear sufficient clout. While any utilitarian trend in the sphere of higher education cannot be discounted considering the changing pattern of job market, lifestyle, material expectation and complexities of life, any extreme polarisation towards utilitarianism is certainly a cause for concern. Education is not always meant to bring about sheer material and commercial benefit, and Flexner seems to be right when he is critical of American higher education's too much polarisation towards commercialisation.

Flexner aims at combining scientific and philosophic investigation. This is conducive in that it helps tedious scientific scholarship mingle with the charms of philosophic and creative imagination and intelligence. Sterile scientific investigation gets life; scholars' mental and intellectual horizons becomes widened as well as released from pedantry and intellectual parochialism. Notably, pure intellectuality without practical implications makes one a pedant, while practical skills without intellectual orientation turns human beings into machines.

Despite the fact that the type of higher education and knowledge Flexner wants to impart looks ambitious or idealistic, the spirit and ideals he fosters have not run out of steam. Knowledge, be it liberal or scientific, needs to be achieved through tough intellectual rigours and efforts. Such rigours come through philosophic contemplation and reflection, intellectual discipline and exercise, and aesthetic excellence. In other words, its main objective should be intellectual stimulation and rigour, and in that spirit his ideas of higher education remain, along with Newman's, current and relevant.

### **2.2.3 Alfred North Whitehead**

Knowledge is useful, and "education is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge" (Whitehead 1962, p. 6). To Whitehead, the essence of higher education is its utility. Its usefulness is varied, and priests as well as politicians acquire education because of its direct or indirect benefits. Knowledge is a product of human talent, and nobody will acquire it if it does not serve any purpose. It is acquired because it can be put to use in the present or in the immediate future, so its immediacy of value is its essence.

One of higher education's important functions, according to Whitehead, consists in its quest for the welfare of the social 'organism'. As he envisages, the goal of university education has never been confined solely to pure abstract learning, and it plays a vital role in the development of a nation. Knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, has to have its own worth. Knowledge, an important criterion of which is truth, is a means to an end; it is not, as in the case of Newman and Flexner, an end in itself. As a means to an end, it trains people's intelligence, and in the modern world trained intelligence is an invaluable asset; it helps the nations of the world to forge ahead overcoming intellectual inertia. As Whitehead puts it, "In the conditions of modern life the rule is absolute; the race which does not value trained intelligence is doomed ... To-day we maintain ourselves. To-morrow science will have moved forward yet one more step, and there will be no appeal from the judgement

which will then be pronounced on the uneducated” (Whitehead 1962, p. 23).

The complexities of life and human intellectuality are intertwined in the sense that human beings use their intellectual capability to solve the problems of their complex life. To achieve this capability, intelligent human beings need proper orientation to equip themselves with problem-solving strategy, analytical ability and creative imagination, and the university is the proper intellectual environment where such orientation needed for success in life and business is imparted. In this regard, Whitehead values imagination and creativity which higher education can spur and nurture through an appropriate research and intellectual orientation. The purpose of higher education is not to simply impart facts and information. As Whitehead puts it, “The university imparts information, but it imparts it imaginatively” (Whitehead 1962, p. 139). Mere knowledge that deals with accumulation of facts and information becomes purposive and gets impregnated with ‘possibilities’ when it gets illuminated with imagination. Imagination “enables men to construct an intellectual vision of a new world, and it preserves the zest of life by the suggestion of satisfying purposes” (ibid, p. 139).

Whitehead regards the university as an agent of social progress. A society's progress, according to Whitehead, is contingent upon “the fact that its educated masses are composed of members each with a tinge of scholarship, a tinge of invention, and a tinge of discovery” (ibid, p. 147). Knowledge leads to progress in the sense that it leads to a new truth which in turn leads to a new discovery or invention of practical application. It is the universities where occurs the fusion of “progressive activities into an effective instrument of progress” (ibid, p. 148). While universities are not the only ‘agencies’ of progress, “it is a fact that to-day the progressive nations are those in which universities flourish” (ibid, p. 148).

### **2.2.3.1 Commentary**

A theorist in the progressive utilitarian line, Whitehead looks at higher education from the viewpoint of direct or indirect uses it can be put to. It is as useful as any commodity that carries values on it, and for no other reason but the practical utility it can be put to nobody will ever venture upon achieving it. Anti-Newmanian in tone, Whitehead does not see any merit in Newman’s claim that knowledge is worth acquiring for its own sake. He resorts to discursive arguments to uphold the view that knowledge primarily and principally deals

with scientific truth, and this very fact makes it useful. Its utility lies in the fact that it is instrumental in bringing about human skills, expertise as well as sharpening human intelligence without which development in the current material world is inconceivable.

Human intellect, knowledge and skills acquired at university help solve practical problems and other complexities of life, and thus knowledge of higher education becomes a means to an end. The abstract nature of knowledge assumes realness through its application to solving concrete problems. In this regard, Whitehead strongly favours the university being a venue for specialised research, and he adds a new dimension to knowledge acquired through high level of research by adding to it the power of creative imagination. While imagination is conceived as something highly charged with abstraction, in Whitehead's hand it assumes tangible power or attains the attributes of intellection which any nations of the world need for material prosperity.

It becomes obvious in Whitehead's theorizing of knowledge and higher education that the humanities do not have even a peripheral role. Even creativity or imagination, a hallmark of humanities education and philosophic abstraction, transforms in his hand into a concrete scientific means of attaining mundane progress. Whitehead seems to have foreshadowed the rampant utilitarianism that has already taken its toll in the academic world. What Whitehead offers the humanists is a clear prognosis: in order to survive in this cut-throat competition of the utilitarian world, they must adjust to changes that are happening around them. They need to be flexible and respond to the exigencies of time and introduce courses or reconfigure existing courses so that they can remain relevant.

To sum up, to Whitehead knowledge is purposive, and it has a social and national dimension as it can bring about development and progress at social and national level. It has an intellectual dimension which requires high level of intellectual rigours to be achieved through research, creativity, and imagination. It helps transform society and human destiny through new discovery and invention. It is not an ordinary entity; it is based on truth which makes it a worthy possession. Although Whitehead attributes all this to useful scientific and business knowledge, the role of the humanities in attaining such objectives is not negligible. Truth, creativity, and imagination are essentially humanities' characteristics. Although he seems to sidetrack humanities education, at least in spirit he accepts the humanities and their latent attributes such as creativity, intellectualism without which higher education in utilitarian line cannot equip students with desired skills required

for progress, either material or intellectual. As well as Whitehead's vision of higher education in utilitarian line serves as a pointer to how the humanities can sustain its usefulness in a changed socio-economic situation. And the fact that higher education in utilitarian line is nowadays an inescapable reality proves his relevance and any higher education system can ignore Whitehead's prescription at greater perils.

#### **2.2.4 Jose Ortega Y Gasset**

According to Gasset, higher education has two major objectives – (a) the teaching of the learned professions and (b) scientific research and the preparation of future investigators. As evident, professionalism and research are two components of higher education, and interestingly, university trains two disparate types of people – one for profession and the other for enhancement of knowledge through research. In this regard, he considers science or scientific research integral to university's existence; it is the spirit of science that makes university education lively and dignified; it saves higher education “from being an automation” (Gasset 1946, p. 76). And its acquisition in conjunction with the knowledge of history, philosophy, of the cosmos gives it a holistic touch of intellectuality.

Gasset is critical of the way higher education is ignoring its cultural significance. To him, culture, especially general culture, consists of ideas of a period; and being an ‘ensemble’ of contemporary ideas, it makes man conscious and keeps him alive in the complex contemporary world. As to the importance of general culture and its transmission through higher education, Gasset says that “... the student is always, nearly always required, apart from his professional apprenticeship and his research, to take some courses of a general character – philosophy, history” (Gasset 1946, p. 42).

Gasset favours a synthesis between culture or the ideas of the age and the study of modern science; and the study of science without ideas remains incomplete and cannot assist in visualising the physical world of creation. As he thinks, science has also a cultural element in it, and by the study of science he does not mean that we must always learn pure science; he means learning the cultural sides of science or the modern notions of science or the scientificity of ideas. The university should cultivate this sort of intellectual effort “dedicated to the task of simplifying and synthesizing the quintessence of science” (Gasset 1946, p. 64). Free of dangerous pedantry, the culture of science helps its practitioners discipline themselves intellectually; it ‘humanizes’ the scientist without which he

lamentably becomes “a barbarian knowing much of one thing” (Gasset 1946, p. 71). He needs to ‘balance’ his “specialization with a symmetrical culture” (ibid).

### 2.2.4.1 Commentary

In his Introduction to Gasset’s *Mission of the University*, Howard Lee Nostrand notes: “If we could solve the problem of general education, we could confidently strike any third world war off the calendar” (in Gasset 1946, p. 1). What Nostrand enunciates echoes the efficacies of education in solving social problems, and Gasset’s *Mission of the University*, according to Nostrand, is an important addition to a ‘repertory’ of works that deal with social problems stemming from the deficiency of general education. The book’s uniqueness, as this critic thinks, lies in the fact that it makes the “boldest and soundest” attack at the “very heart of the problem” and attempts to elucidate “our vision of a larger strategy, a *mission* that might enable us to marshal our techniques, so as to make an adequate attack on the fundamental problem of modern society” (ibid).

To many critics, Gasset is an idealist who considers university a remote outpost nourishing society through the transmission of general culture. Exonerating him from the allegation of being aloof from societal exigencies, Nostrand claims that he is “thoroughly conscious of society, and ... he has had in mind how it would lend itself to a fruitful interplay between the university’s organized critical knowledge and the lessons men learn in the school of experience” (in Gasset 1946, p. 8).

It is evident from Nostrand’s discussion that higher education is beneficial to society in solving its problems, and Gasset is well aware of this. His attempt to exonerate this theorist from being an idealist is credible. Although he cannot shed his idealistic posture altogether, Gasset is much ahead of his predecessors with regard to the value of scientific research and investigation. Besides, his attempt to bring about a synthesis between science and culture as well as between profession and the humanities has a greater relevance in our time.

Gasset’s views on higher education are a marked departure from Flexner’s and Newman’s although he still toes the traditional stance. He, unlike Newman and Flexner, incorporates both professionalism and intellectualism into the sphere of higher education, and is far

ahead of Flexner in giving universities more concrete and realistic social role. Gasset's university combines, to the greater benefit of society, both professional and intellectual cultures. Society benefits from the university that equips people with practical as well as investigative skills; the former comes through practical training and teaching, while the latter is achieved through research.

There are allegations that Gasset cannot sever link with his predecessors altogether, and in true Newmanian vein he includes into his *Mission of the University* transmission of general culture as one of the prime functions of the university. His transmission of culture does the same function as Newman's liberal education does towards making a gentleman or cultured person. However, such a transmission of culture that consists of general ideas derived from history, philosophy and humanities is not the primary function of the university; rather it complements professional and scientific knowledge and training. The university, through the transmission of culture, humanises professions and their practitioners. The whole human being can be created by way of counterbalancing professional education with the education of general culture. When professional people are shorn of human values, indoctrinated and devoid of "culture of the age" they, despite their role towards material development of the world, "... emit thoughts that are monstrosities and opinions that are torrents of drivel and bluff" (Gasset 1946, p. 47).

Also, Gasset's claim that the university is a place that keeps people abreast of the callings of the time by propagating culture is not a mere re-statement of the notion of culture as ideas of the age. Universities, by teaching culture, help uphold the spirit of the time. He calls it a culture of science, which means a synthesis of science and the spirit of the age. In an age when specialisation that narrows down one's interest and with it one's outlook is unavoidable, the culture of science by inculcating scientificity in us will help specialise in the "construction of the whole" (Gasset 1946, p. 72). The force of science will have to be controlled; and it can be done "by a force pulling in the opposite direction, constraining centrifugal science in a wholesome organisation" (ibid).

Gasset's concern at the disproportionate importance of the study of science in universities, further augmented and manifested through the rising importance of commerce, economics and business-related courses at the cost of humanities, is still current and bears greater legitimacy. The ecology of our intellectual pursuit which university is the best place to carry on has lost balance because of the neglect now being meted out to the humanities and

subjects of general interest. While humanities cannot create means and prospect for material prosperity, it prepares the intellectual atmosphere and mentality to accept scientific changes and discovery. Without emotional readiness and intellectual preparedness any scientific discovery, even social changes, will land on the people as a bombshell and dislocate the existing belief systems to the utter disruption of social ecology. Besides, statesmen, politicians, policy makers, when they lack real cultural and intellectual orientation and training, may become fascists in their mental make-up and political beliefs and cause further havoc to world peace and social harmony.

To sum up, Gasset's idea of higher education is relatively developed in that it represents almost all the characteristic features, functions, and objectives of a modern university. It values teaching and research, science and the humanities, cultivation of scientific as well as general education. It encompasses the transmission of general culture without which science and scientific knowledge remains more mechanical in its import. In his vision, scientific and general education, while they have their own distinctive attributes, mingle together to award higher education a holistic touch or a touch of near wholeness. Gasset calls all these objectives 'mission' which by its very import refers to responsibilities that are more elevated and nobler in nature.

### **2.2.5 Karl Jaspers**

To Jaspers, the university, as an institution of higher learning, trains professional people; it transmits intellectual culture by offering subjects of general interest such as philosophy, history, humanities, and conducts research in both science and humanities. In a university these three tasks are interrelated and "factors of a living whole. By isolating them, the spirit of the university perishes" (Jaspers 1960, p. 57). Any institution of higher education should enrich itself by combining philology with philosophy, technology with theory, facts with ideas. As well as it is expected of the university to preserve and promote "the scientific spirit by transforming and assimilating the new materials and skills and integrating them in the light of a few leading ideas" (ibid, p. 102).

As Jaspers further enunciates, "... all human activity involves knowledge. Wherever there arises a demand for knowledge the university is responsible for forging ahead in the new field and teaching it" (ibid, p. 101). It is an imperative for the university to be responsive to

innovation and new ideas in the field of knowledge; otherwise it will become insular and lag behind the spirit of the age. Also, Jaspers upholds the value of theoretical knowledge in an age of practical and scientific thought, invention and discovery, and considers theoretical work, abstract knowledge, experimentation and research in no way less important. In support of his argument, he quotes Hegel: “Theoretical work accomplishes more than practical work. Once the realm of concepts is revolutionized, reality cannot hold out against it” (cited in Jaspers, p. 76).

As Jaspers argues, “The unity of science is a philosophical idea. In practice the philosophical ideal of unity became the search for a single organic body of knowledge...” (Jaspers 1960, p. 93). Philosophical ideal or point of view consists in looking at any body of knowledge not separately but as a whole. Science is philosophy as long as it does not get trapped purely in its means at the cost of its noble end. To him, philosophy has got its own ‘value’ and ‘dignity’; it adds value to all other branches of knowledge. Here what is important is the “philosophical impulse” or philosophical thought which permeates the whole of the university (ibid, pp. 60-61). Philosophy as a university subject is not as important to the scholar of the day; what is important is its all-pervasive intellectual force and spirit. In fact, knowledge does not exist as separate branches without any thread of unity tying them together. It is rather an organic whole and all branches of knowledge have a common root; and this way of looking at the wholeness of knowledge is the scientific or philosophic way of seeing knowledge. Knowledge, looked at in such a unified way, represents its deeper meaning. It aims at educating people by engaging their rational and philosophic impulse which is highly decisive in making the whole man.

Noticeably, the scientific as well as philosophic outlook of knowledge differentiates it from practical training that fragments knowledge into separate skills; each skill is different in nature and there is no inner link connecting them. It is concerned not with the whole or purity of knowledge, but with the particular skill required for a particular occupation. However, it does not mean that there is no room for technical knowledge and training in the university. In fact, always it must meet the exigencies of the tangible occupations. However, it attains a newer and more meaningful dimension when it meets these needs through defining their place within the whole of knowledge. Knowledge in its unified whole or as “a cosmos of knowledge” does not arise from its “practical application”; it, in reality, originates from its philosophy. It gains its strength and life-force from the “diffusion of philosophical awareness throughout the university” (Jaspers, pp. 93-94).

### 2.2.5.1 Commentary

In the hands of Jaspers the idea of higher education takes a more mature look, and unlike his predecessors who fail to concur on common functions, aims and objectives with which a modern university needs to be entrusted, he puts forward a list of functions that appears to be holistic. The university he envisions engages in research and teaching, science and humanities, science and philosophy, practical training and theoretical knowledge, empirically proven knowledge as well as abstract thoughts, transmission of scientific knowledge as well as of culture. The higher education students acquire in a university atmosphere is useful for its own sake as well as it carries direct or practical utility. While it helps make a whole man by helping him grow mentally, intellectually and rationally to face the complexities of modern life, at the same time it equips him with professional knowledge, practical training and expertise needed to face the material problems of life. He stresses on a higher education system that can cater to our moral, intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic as well as our physical and material needs.

Jaspers' admission of the fact that university education improves one's mental and intellectual power as part of its indirect objectives resolves an important issue which many of his predecessors, including Newman, are preoccupied with: it is their contentious belief that knowledge is useful for its own sake. Jaspers resolves the riddle and says that knowledge can be useful for its own sake, but it is not part of its conscious design. Knowledge must have its direct utility and any other usefulness it has got is peripheral to its practical or direct benefits. The task of morality or character building a university performs through the propagation of philosophic truth and moral virtues is not, therefore, its conscious act. They are rather parts of its indirect or collateral benefits.

Jaspers reinforces the belief which some of his predecessors have been active to uphold, and it is the fact that knowledge is a unified whole. It is neither a fragment that can be achieved through a study of individual subject, nor is it an accumulation of mere facts and figures that do not have holistic or unified values and ideas. This view half-heartedly promoted by his forebears achieves more tangible looks when he looks at teaching, research, professional knowledge, practical training, philosophic and intellectual insights as one and indivisible whole. They are integral to all branches of knowledge and one without the other remains incomplete. He is ahead of some of his predecessors in freeing knowledge from pure philosophic abstractions: knowledge consists of both abstract ideas

as well as empirical observation, experiment, and investigation. He strikes a balance between theory and practice; between ideas and facts; between abstraction and the concrete; between pure intellectuality and practical skills. When he speaks about theoretical knowledge, he does not mean that such knowledge consists of purely abstract ideas; he does not propagate abstract knowledge that has no basis of philosophic truth. In other words, he does not fantasise theoretical knowledge. Theory that has only the support of philosophic truth can assume the status of knowledge. Otherwise, such knowledge can be discarded as ecclesiastical sermons or supernatural tales. In other words, he is an advocate of a higher education system that is purely rational, logical, scientific, and empirically driven.

Jaspers' cosmic view of knowledge that depends on philosophic wholeness helps accommodate technical skills allowing them a due place within the greater bounds of knowledge. Technical skills which are fragmented in nature get illuminated with the cosmic vision of philosophic knowledge and become a part of knowledge proper in its unified whole. His idea of the philosophic acquisition of knowledge as well as looking at all branches of knowledge from a holistic perspective reiterates Newman's views on the issue. However, he is ahead of Newman in that his philosophic acquisition of knowledge is actually, as Cameron (2000) puts it, a philosophic attitude or view point and has a touch of scientificity. He puts emphasis more on the philosophic spirit or impulse rather than on studying philosophy as a subject proper. It is the philosophic truth that we need for full intellectual development is his concern. What Newman considers useful for its own sake assumes in his hand a utilitarian attribute; but at the same time it does not lose its liberal or philosophic undertone. Truth in all its facets – philosophic truth, scientific truth, aesthetic truth – combines to bring about mental, intellectual, analytical development in those who dedicate themselves to the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Liberal intellectuals, philosophers, scientists, technicians – all are required to be imbued with the real spark of philosophic truth to acquire knowledge and skills in their respective fields. In accomplishing their respective professional duties, they are also guided by the same intellectual, rational and analytical attributes. The coexistence of teaching and research in a university environment does help the seekers of knowledge simultaneously achieve these attributes. Besides, knowledge looked at from philosophic and holistic whole adds values to all branches of knowledge. Science imbued with philosophic truth, practical skills acquired in conjunction with scientific and philosophical analysis as well as spirit becomes useful materially as well as intellectually. While such knowledge and skills help solve

practical problems, at the same time they enhance mental and intellectual power which is purely abstract in nature.

However, Jasper's positive contribution to the idea of university appears to be marred by his implicit harbouring in his mind a liking for the medieval ideality of knowledge. It is the philosophical abstraction through which he wants to keep alive that spirit. This very tendency of being nostalgic of the past fails to free him completely from his idealism about higher education. While his argument of keeping knowledge unified through the practice of philosophic truth sounds convincing, in practice it becomes problematic to blend philosophy and its spirit with practical training and skills. As a result, in real life we hardly get persons educated in the way Jaspers enunciates, i.e, knowledge in its totality or a person trained in scientific knowledge or professional skills having the needed philosophic orientation or the cosmos of knowledge. At best a university, within its cosmopolitan milieu where scholarly freedom, integrity and tolerance are practiced, can create an ideal cosmic environment of knowledge. Scholars, students, researchers, and teachers breathe the free air of this cosmopolitan world of knowledge and mould their intellectual character accordingly.

### **2.2.6 Clark Kerr**

The modern university, which Kerr regards as 'multiversity' because of its multifarious functions and objectives, is no longer regarded as an ivory tower; it is neither an Oxford nor a Berlin; it is not a 'cloistered' teaching community as envisaged by Newman, nor is it a research laboratory envisioned by such theorists as Flexner, Jaspers. The university, regarded as an engine of growth and development, moulds its character and define its missions and objectives on the basis of the national imperatives it encounters. In retrospect, Greece, the Italian cities, France, Spain, England, Germany, and currently the USA, and Japan, have been able to develop themselves intellectually and materially through their higher education system. Today, more than ever, the quality of a nation and its higher education system are inalienably linked. As Kerr (1963, p. 66) puts it, "... the university has become a prime instrument of a national purpose;" and it embraces changes and adjusts its curriculum, teaching and research strategy, course offering and its priorities, teaching and research expertise to cope with the demands time places on it.

It is deeply entrenched in the life of society. It is the society which is the principal beneficiary of knowledge the university produces. It as “producer, wholesaler and retailer of knowledge cannot escape service. Knowledge, today, is for everybody’s sake” (Kerr (1963, p. 86). In view of the changing reality, the university is being asked to produce knowledge to meet multifarious needs of society -- knowledge for “civic and regional purposes, for national purposes, and even for no purpose at all beyond the realization that most knowledge eventually comes to serve mankind” (ibid, p.xiv).

The university’s sphere of influence has expanded due to another vital fact that it is the source of new ideas and innovation. So, the wider society and its lay people, politicians and other agencies have to rely on the university and its professors and researchers for new ideas, which the former need to solve various problems. The ideas created by economists, philosophers, as the British economist Keynes puts it, are always in demand; the practical-minded people feel they become richer intellectually if they, even slavishly, follow the idea of some intellectuals; the politicians with the idealist bent of mind are fond of ‘distilling’ their passion with the ideas of some intellectuals.

The multiversity has become a moulder as well as shaper of cultures and values. A virtual melting pot of students from different backgrounds and origins and age-groups, it is a meeting point of varied cultures and ideologies. Students with different tastes, aptitudes, philosophies, and political orientations interact with each other to make university life more diverse and more meaningful. It becomes a pageant of different cultures and sub-cultures which complement as well as enrich each other. Knowledge acquired in the classroom gets enriched with real-life experiences and interactions. Campus life becomes culturally and intellectually more diversified from which all its inmates benefit.

The modern university through its humanities and social sciences faculties performs vital ethical and moral responsibilities, too. While scientists invent knowledge and expertise without thinking about their consequences, it is the humanities and social sciences that play the ethical role and help eliciting their bad impacts. They play particular roles in helping to define the good as well as the true and add wisdom to truth. In fact, intellects trained in the humanities line can restore sense and sanity in the problem-torn world riven by war and ideological conflicts.

### **2.2.6.1 Commentary**

Kerr's 'multiversity' is not anybody's deliberate invention or creation. It is the product of time and circumstances. Social needs and imperatives as well as historical inevitability has contributed to determining the nature, destiny, and structure of the modern university. What we see of the modern university today has not been made or attained overnight; it is rather the outcome of centuries' of gradual developmental or evolutionary processes. It is the realisation of this very fact that prompts Kerr to say that it does not have its creator or propagator, "...but ... has its reality rooted in the logic of history. It is an imperative rather than a reasoned choice among elegant alternatives" (Kerr 1963, p.5).

Kerr certainly wakes up to the reality surrounding us, and hence his is an attempt to posit higher education in its current practicality. He looks at the university as an agent of material development. In this sense, his is a utilitarian approach that identifies the need for higher education in conformity with the reality on the ground. In his hand the 'Ivory Tower' comes to the ground level so that it can be of use to all living on its vicinity. The university, instead of being a venue of idealised knowledge or knowledge for its own sake, serves individual as well as national purpose. It becomes a social service station that responds to and fulfils varied socio-economic demands. To accomplish its utilitarian role more efficiently, it becomes pliant about multifarious of social and practical needs and gets integrated into the larger society to serve its practical as well as intellectual needs. It simultaneously acts as a social critic as well as devotes itself to the creation and propagation of new knowledge.

While Kerr deserves kudos for his realistic assessment of the modern university, it is not without blemishes. The multiversity does not become a benchmark for the modern university. While it embraces changes that are relevant to our needs and aspiration, it undermines the universally accepted idea and objectives of a university. Through fragmentation as well as sheer expansion in size it becomes a departmental store that markets products of all tastes and flavours. Knowledge becomes as trendy and cheap as chocolate bars or candies and loses its traditional dignity. Its mission to open up higher education by offering equality of opportunity ultimately loses sight of its noble goals as knowledge itself gets cheapened through a wholesale expansion of higher education.

It is true that the modern university is an agent of change in the sphere of society's material, cultural, and intellectual development, and it renews and reshapes its mission according to the course and direction society takes. This is evident from the socioeconomic uplift the developed nations of the world have undergone in the recent decades. The link between a good university system and a nation's economic prosperity is much more obvious in the current world, and this very fact makes the university a prime instrument of national purpose. However, Kerr seems to regard the modern university more as a knowledge industry which enhances people's skills and expertise than as a bastion of intellectual development.

### **2.2.7 A theoretical synthesis**

The fact that knowledge needs to have tangible values does not exclude acquiring it for its own sake. Aristotle, Arnold, Newman, Flexner – all of them consider learning for its own sake an innate human proclivity which itself is an important reason for the acquisition of knowledge at a university setting. It fulfils one important criterion of acquisition of knowledge – personal fulfilment as well as self-development. Also, the humanities are a source of aesthetic pleasures which act as a cure for life's banality and mundaneness. Any human society can ignore these aspects of higher education only at the cost of its intellectual, mental, emotional, psychological health. Even when the university explicitly targets tangible knowledge that has ready utility, arrangements should be in place so that intangible and abstract knowledge is imparted either directly or at least as a by-product of useful knowledge.

In fact, the university should be a venue for teaching, research, the sciences and the humanities, practical training and theoretical and abstract thoughts, and as such creativity, intellection, intuition, reflection and imagination that are the hallmarks of humanities education should not be spurned or discouraged. Rather varied forms of acquiring knowledge should be reoriented or reformed to include them so that professional skills and knowledge can derive intellectual strength and vitality from intangible liberal knowledge as well as they get enriched and refined by shedding off mechanical aridity or barrenness.

Humanities education and professional qualifications should not be considered two extreme poles of a parallel line that does not have the possibility of meeting each other. Rather they should be considered points of a common continuum that collaborate with each other in the acquisition and transmission of knowledge. They are not exclusive; rather they are complementary to each other. As seen, Jaspers, Gasset, and Flexner recognise and acknowledge the value of both tangible and intangible knowledge. While Newman values knowledge for its own sake, he does not altogether exclude the tangible value of knowledge; what he wants of tangible professional knowledge is to attain intellectual rigour and depth. Similarly, Whitehead, a votary of utilitarianism, acknowledges the value of abstract knowledge. Imagination and creativity, although they have little tangible value, enhance the value of practical knowledge when they comingle with practical skills. Although Kerr's line of thinking is mainly utilitarian, he accepts the value of the humanities; they can help solve problems created by rampant use of scientific knowledge; they generate ideas which practical minded people use in their profession; they help sprout and nurture culture.

Newman, Flexner, Gasset, and Jaspers eulogize as well as recognise the role of the humanities in humanizing the professionals who are narrowly trained in their professional fields. Equally true is their claim that through their civilizing power the humanities can bring about a balance as well as sanity in the world that has become unsafe due to thoughtless application of science and technology. Gasset even goes further and attempts to use general education or culture to mitigate world problems. Disproportionate emphasis on professional and scientific education can deprive society of the benefits of theoretical education that has the potential to give birth to new theories and ideas expediting social change. As well as by creating an emotional and intellectual environment for change, the humanities can assimilate any socio-political fallout that accrues from sudden social transformation.

Knowledge has social relevance and is instrumental in social change. Newman, Flexner, Gasset, Whitehead, and Kerr, although they differ in their *modus operandi*, believe in the efficacy or power of knowledge to bring about social change. While Whitehead and Kerr believe, in the utilitarian and pragmatic line, in material change and transformation, Newman and Flexner look to moral, intellectual, and civic transformation. A healthy adjustment of each other's line of action can ensure a robust social progress. That there is a possibility for such an alliance is obvious from how Whitehead, despite his belief in pure

utilitarianism, takes resort to the power of creative imagination, ostensibly a humanities attribute, to equip students and researchers with skills required to bring about material prosperity.

Knowledge needs to be acquired in its true spirits as well as in its holistic whole. Newman's philosophical acquisition of knowledge, Gasset's culture of science and Jaspers' philosophical impulse or cosmos of knowledge, although such views sound idealistic, are not without merit. When their views are pitted against technical knowledge that splits or fragments knowledge into separate compartments, they bear considerable clout. In fact, knowledge has an inner force or vitality that remains implicit or unarticulated but works imperceptibly and satiates human inquisitiveness. Notably, this inner force, though latent, works in tandem with other explicit forms of knowledge to make a person quintessentially knowledgeable as well as intellectually empowered.

One important observation is pertinent in the above context. The extreme polarization between liberal or humanities education that promotes knowledge for its own sake or prepares students for a life of ideas and professional education that prepares students for a life that deals with monetary gain is based on misplaced or simplistic approaches. It is expected that both disciplines need to complement each other by means of distinct ways of learning, new frameworks, and strategies of inquiry (Lewis & Liegler 1998, p. 50). In this case, an integration between humanities and professional education is essential as nowadays all disciplines are required to be understood in their 'embeddedness' in the larger world. While professional knowledge is job-focused and targets monetary gains, it is important that it be productive and useful in social context. Through such practice, it attains liberal character or even becomes liberal arts when it becomes useful in social context. At this point even Newman advocates the efficacy of professional education if it is socially embedded and gets enriched by liberal or humanities education. John Stuart Mill, according to Bousfield (1996), supports the intermingling of professional training with liberal education as the latter will make the professionals better individual citizens; liberal knowledge "should ... bring the light of general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit" (Mill, cited in Bousfield 1996, p. 70).

## **2.3 An epistemological underpinning: the changing nature of knowledge**

The nature of knowledge, its modes of production, and its use have undergone significant paradigmatic shifts in recent times necessitating looking at the issue of relevance afresh. This section will outline a brief background history of the emergence of knowledge economy as well as that of a new mode of knowledge production that suits the new paradigm. In the changed context, the topic ‘relevance of higher education’ has assumed a fresh dimension, and this thesis will attempt to redefine the role of the humanities in the backdrop of such an emergent scenario. The knowledge economy paradigm undoubtedly suits technical and scientific knowledge; however, it requires to be seen how the humanities, with their tenuous connection to wealth creation, can adjust to these new developments. This section shows how the humanities can reconfigure themselves to the knowledge economy paradigm and the new mode of knowledge production in order to remain relevant in the changed circumstances.

### **2.3.1 Knowledge Economy**

Since the 1980s there has been a significant rise in “interest in and analysis of the nature and contribution of knowledge to the modern economy and society” (Johnston 1998, p. 1). The old ways of knowledge production needed to be seen from fresh perspectives as practitioners of knowledge had found in the generation as well as application of scientific knowledge a conduit for wealth creation. Since the emergence of the industrial era that gave birth to the capitalist economy in the eighteenth century the relationship between knowledge and wealth creation has gone through two stages and the process of a third stage is in the offing. Johnston (1998, p. 1), on the authority of Drucker (1993), refers to the first two stages as (i) “knowledge applied to tools, processes and products” and (ii) “knowledge applied to human work.”

As to the third stage that is emerging or has already emerged, Johnston (1998), again on the authority of Drucker (1993), terms it as “knowledge society” or knowledge economy, which is a stage of “knowledge ... being applied to knowledge itself” (Johnston, p. 1). As Biesta (2007) elaborates it, in industrial societies the relationship between knowledge production and the economy was indirect through the application of scientific knowledge and technology in industrial settings; however, in the post-industrial stage knowledge is a

means of wealth creation in its own right. Drucker (1993; also, Gertler *et al* 2002; Rob & Bullen 2004), predicting the emergence and the nature of the knowledge society, says that knowledge will be used in the emerging society as an economic resource as well as the main conduit for wealth creation. Knowledge workers, equipped with the skill to use knowledge in an innovative and productive way, will be the main driving force behind economic development.

Also, at the knowledge economy stage, knowledge is ‘marketable’ and its value in the market is contingent upon the ‘demand-supply’ paradigm. Johnston (1998), relying on the findings of Gibbons and his fellow researchers (1994), talks about the increasing demand for marketable knowledge in the international competition in business and industry. An OECD report (OECD 1996, p. 9) further focuses on this issue: “The OECD economies are more strongly dependent on the production, distribution, and use of knowledge than ever before.”

### **2.3.2 The new mode of knowledge production**

With the emergence of the knowledge economy the traditional way of producing knowledge at institutions of higher education seems to have undergone a shift. Gibbons *et al* (1994) categorise knowledge production into two – Mode 1 and Mode 2 – types. These researchers term the traditional way of knowledge production as Mode 1 while the emerging new mode is called Mode 2. Johnston (1998, p. 15) summarises the characteristics of Mode 1 knowledge production thus: knowledge is produced and problem-solutions are targeted in keeping with researchers’ academic interest; the knowledge parameter and its problem-solving agenda do not transcend respective disciplinary boundaries; the community of researchers is homogenous and its form of organisation is hierarchical.

Pitting the new mode of knowledge (Mode 2) against Mode 1, Gibbons *et al* (1994) identify a number of attributes of knowledge production in Mode 2. Some of the vital attributes of the new Mode are as follows:

### **2.3.2.1 Knowledge produced in the context of application**

In Mode 2, knowledge production is “organised around a particular application” (Gibbons *et al* 1994, p.4 ). This is in stark contrast to Mode 1 in which the context of knowledge production is understood in terms of academic or disciplinary setting as well as basic research. At the same time in Mode 2, knowledge is produced to solve problems or meet specific practical needs considered “useful to someone whether in industry or government, or society more generally” (ibid).

### **2.3.2.2 Transdisciplinarity**

The solution of any problems calls for integration of different skills and knowledge emanating from different disciplinary considerations or arrangements. As the problem-solving task in Mode 2 requires an interdisciplinary approach and is beyond the contribution of any single discipline, it is essentially transdisciplinary.

### **2.3.2.3 Heterogeneity and organizational diversity**

Production of knowledge in Mode 2 requires experts from multifarious fields and disciplines, and the composition of the teams of experts changes from time to time on the basis of changing requirements for such skills. Problems that can arise in course of the functioning of such production cannot be anticipated in advance, and the skills and expertise that are required to produce knowledge cannot be anticipated. Knowledge production in Mode 2 revolves around problems that are transitory and dynamic in nature and this necessitates frequent reorganisation and configuration of the problem-solving teams or networks. Temporary research networks and organisations are constituted around particular problems. Once the problem is solved, networks are dissolved and reassembled around new problems.

### **2.3.2.4 Social accountability and reflexivity**

The applications of research outcomes, scientific innovations and inventions have raised concerns in society as to their adverse outcomes in the fields of environment, health, procreation and communications that in turn have had effects on the production of knowledge in Mode 2. Researchers from the social sciences and humanities disciplines are drawn together alongside engineers, natural scientists, lawyers, and businessmen as the nature of the problem and its application and implications call for. Adverse effects on

individual values and tradition demand greater social accountability and this very case brings in the ethical question of which areas of research are worth doing and which are not. The fields of humanities provide avenues for ‘reflexivity’ in such ethical and legal issues and as “reflexivity within the research process spreads, the humanities too are experiencing an increase in demand for the sorts of knowledge they have to offer” (Gibbons *et al* 1994, p. 7).

### **2.3.2.5 The marketability and commercialisation of knowledge**

The pre-eminence of technological knowledge and innovation gives countries and firms the edge over others in the knowledge business; and the more a country or a firm is successful in commercialising knowledge, the more it achieves commercial superiority. Cunningham (2005, p. 93) puts it thus: “... a knowledge-based economy is not based on old-style comparative factor advantages, but on competitive advantage, that is, what can be constructed out of integrated labor force, education, technology and investment strategies.”

The changing context of commercialization of knowledge has spurred the growth of and demand for specialised knowledge whose production suits the Mode 2 better. Although the traditional method of knowledge production cannot be altogether sidetracked, it is no longer enough. Success in the commercialization of knowledge depends on its specialized and recondite nature as well as its non-imitativeness or non-replicability. Also, knowledge needs to be produced in the context of application as well as in response to the necessity of problem identification and problem solution. Obviously, such “skills do not arise spontaneously and are going to be in increasing demand”, and they “pose a challenge to existing systems of knowledge production [Mode 1]” (Gibbons *et al* 1994, p. 63). And this very fact calls for configuring it in Mode 2.

As evident from the above deliberation, the new mode of knowledge production is more application oriented. The traditional way of producing knowledge in institutional settings using disciplinary arrangements for sheer advancement of knowledge as well as for the sake of curiosity alone has diffused. The new mode is more collaborative and characterised by closer interaction between scientific, technological and industrial modes of knowledge production. The disciplinary boundaries as well as the institutional settings have weakened; temporary clusters comprising experts formed around big projects with practical application of knowledge as their main objectives have replaced secure and permanent institutional settings. Besides, the new mode is more characterised by increased social

accountability. Knowledge is specialised and treated more as an economic good that has its value in the knowledge market and such knowledge is obtained by creative configuring and reconfiguring of competence to meet sophisticated user needs. Moreover, the knowledge market has an international dimension, and the production of knowledge is driven by intensification of international competition as well as commercial advantage. Knowledge production has become more sophisticated and specialised, a process which cannot be easily replicated. Unlike in the industrial economy where competition is based more on “economy of scale”, in the new knowledge economy it is replaced by “economy of scope” (Gibbons *et al* 1994, p. 63) which is achieved by configuring and reconfiguring knowledge through specialised skills requiring creativity, innovation and problem-solving ability.

### **2.3.3 The humanities and Mode 2 knowledge production**

Gibbons *et al* (1994, p. 93) maintain that the characteristics that formalise the sciences-commercialisation nexus in Mode 2 knowledge production are dominantly present, albeit ‘serendipitously’, in the humanities. They discover striking similarities between developments that have recently occurred in the humanities, especially in the mass culture industry, and the characteristics of Mode 2 knowledge production in science and technology disciplines. The possible affinities between the sciences and the humanities they discover are in the areas of (a) growth of output, (b) transdisciplinarity obliterating disciplinary frontiers, (c) realigning the definition of what counts as knowledge, (d) increasing commercialisation and social contextualisation of knowledge, (e) diversification of the sites of knowledge production, (f) and massification of research and higher education. Some of these features that fit the humanities are outlined below:

#### **2.3.3.1 Growth of output**

Paralleling the growth of scientific outputs, those in the humanities have grown as phenomenally. Based on a 1992 UNESCO reports, Gibbons *et al* (1994, p. 94) point out that in the world intellectual activities such as publication of books increased from 332000 titles in 1960 to 842,000 in 1990, “a growth of about two and a half times over that thirty years” which clearly indicates “perhaps a better measure of the general expansion of ‘intellectual activities’” (Gibbons *et al* 1994, p. 94). As these same researchers argue, such

an “expansion of output is as pronounced a phenomenon in the humanities and the wider domain of culture as science, technology and industry” (Gibbons *et al* 1994, p. 94).

Also, the cultural arena has experienced similar growth. In 1945, in New York only a handful of art galleries used to exhibit paintings by artists whose number was not more than twenty. In 1985, about 150,000 artists used to exhibit their art works in the city’s 700 galleries. In late nineteenth-century Paris the number of art works produced in a decade was 200,000 while the number in the late 20th century was ‘staggering’ 15 million a decade. What Gibbons *et al* (1994, p. 95) say in this regard is quite relevant: “And this is only the tip of the iceberg. These front-line products of culture are vastly outnumbered by ... cultural mass ” that constitutes the transmitters of culture (not its creators; although its creators might be transmitters as well) working in different sectors such as higher education, publishing, magazines, broadcast media, theatre, museums.

### **2.3.3.2 Heterogeneity**

The emerging culture industry is ‘diverse’ and producing heterogeneous knowledge in keeping with the trends in Mode 2 knowledge production. It consists of such elite-type of cultural productions as patronised by the state and are being consumed in the culture market by users when such products are presented through exhibitions, concerts, and performances. There are markets for classics, serious fictions, classical music and cultural tourism through the exploitation of heritage industry. Above all, there is the “all-pervasive popular culture of the modern world produced by mass literacy and the all-powerful advertising images which shape the postindustrial economy” (Gibbons *et al* 1994, p. 96).

### **2.3.3.3 Commercialisation, context of application and contextualization**

There is evidence that cultural production and consumption have become, through commercialization, a dynamic component of modern economy. Although at times cultural projects are heavily subsidized (a practice that subverts commercialization), most cultural production is unambiguously conducted by means of commercial practices and ethos. Notably, the humanities and the culture industry are interlinked and through this linkage the former have direct impact on the real-world economy. By way of analogy, it could be said that cultural products are the “symbolic currency in the market of life chances in the way new products underpin the hard currency in the markets of industry” (Gibbons *et al*

1994, p. 99). They influence people's consumption patterns by shaping life-styles, values and political culture. As Gibbons et al (1994, p. 99) rightly put it, "As the humanities play a key role in both mass higher education systems, specifically, and in cultural sophistication, generally, they are deeply implicated in these developments."

While the humanities have obvious economic and societal benefits, the cost of cultural production as well as the cost of producing humanities scholarship is not comparatively high as it has been mainly absorbed within the infrastructure of rapidly expanding higher education systems. As it is apparent, literary production does not require expensive equipment and instrumentation; its cost of computing is quite low. Also, the logistics of philosophy have remained unchanged since the time of antiquity (Gibbons *et al* 1994).

In terms of its social application and contextualisation, knowledge or scholarship in the humanities is deeply rooted in social applications. All the principal disciplines of the humanities such as history, literature, languages, philosophy are in direct contact with human life and its existence and reality. These disciplines and their different perspectives engage the human existential situation, whether it is rooted in individual consciousness or social experience. Besides, social transformation and humanities scholarship are intimately connected. Educational opportunities created especially through higher education help bring about required social consciousness that in turn expedites societal change. The ongoing massification process of the higher education sector seems to be more closely linked to the expansion of the humanities disciplines which in turn is enhancing the mass benefit of higher education through its social transformational power. The fact that they are deeply embroiled in the social practices and thoughts has brought about various socio-political and economic revolutions in the world.

The humanities' social involvement and the increasing applicability of natural sciences have brought them together in terms of their social contextualisation. As a result, "mixed arenas have emerged in which natural scientists, social scientists, humanists and activists of all sorts are publicly debating issues that no longer respect the traditional boundaries between natural sciences and the humanities" (Gibbons *et al*, pp. 99-100). Such an interaction has given rise to social accountability as well as balancing the risks and benefits of scientific-technical knowledge. In order to enhance the humanities' social relevance, transdisciplinarity or permeability of different disciplines has been developed. Natural sciences are studied in conjunction with ethics, philosophy, and applied social sciences.

### **2.3.3.4 A conceptual discussion on aligning Mode 2 knowledge to poor countries**

King and McGrath (2002) argue that Mode 2 knowledge informs the production of knowledge and its utilization in different ways. Actually, the attributes of Mode 2 Knowledge – in particular, its emphasis on the application value of knowledge, reliance of the increased value of knowledge on innovation and research as a means of creating niche areas of knowledge, and commercialization of knowledge relate it to similar contemporary developments such as knowledge economy, globalization, and the production of new knowledge which, unlike the traditional mode of knowledge, follows a “problem-based, transdisciplinary and horizontal model (King & McGrath 2002, p. 26). However, such developments that are “largely Northern-initiated and –focused” require new alignments to have any significant impacts upon the South (ibid).

Actually, the whole idea of knowledge creation (by using knowledge workers and marketing knowledge on a commercial basis in the global knowledge market) works on market forces or competitiveness, and not all the countries are equally capable of playing their desired roles in this knowledge business. The poor countries can target selectively their niche areas or areas that require less investment in research and development. In this regard, the Indian IT revolution is an emulating success story: “India does not rank very high in most indexes of technological progress. Its software industry, however, is recognized worldwide as a success. In 2000-2001 its software exports accounted for 14 percent of total exports with revenues of US\$6.2 billion and a growth rate 55 percent above that of the previous year. This success is not only one of volume, but also of quality and technical excellence” (Aubert & Reffers 2003, p. 15). Following India’s stance, a poor country like Bangladesh can choose one or two of its thrust areas such as the garment sector which is currently its major export; also, it can rejuvenate its now moribund jute industry sector that was once its monopoly in the international commodity market. Through targeted or selected research and innovations projects or enterprise it can create a viable or niche market in the knowledge business in these sectors both in terms of economy of scale and scope. Also, developing the mass creative industries requires fewer infrastructures, less investment (of course we are not talking about multi-billion dollars Hollywood project), and the uniqueness of all the countries in terms of their culture, language, and people can give each country a competitive advantage in the creative knowledge market.

Knowledge creation and innovation also depends, in addition to tangible scientific and research expertise, on intangible aspects such as “the capacity to formulate a vision, the level of trust and self-confidence, and the appropriateness of guiding values. In fact, these qualitative elements are “the driving force in the move toward new models of development” (Aubert & Reffers 2003, p. 11). The poor countries can develop their innovation strategies by using such intangible attributes since these attributes are not dependent on technological and scientific superiority which the developing countries lack. Such intangible attributes as vision, honest leadership, appropriate value guidance, supported by conscious and proactive government policy initiatives with regard to investment and higher education and research, can work towards bringing about desired success in the global knowledge market which requires producing knowledge according to norms of Mode 2 knowledge and knowledge economy. The case of Ireland, dubbed the Celtic Tiger, can be cited as an imitable example. In fact, Ireland has demonstrated that a country traditionally labeled one of the poorest members of the European Union, highly dependent on agriculture and low-end manufacturing, can successfully turn its economy into a provider of high-technology services. Ireland’s success is attributable to sustained and well-targeted investment in education and to a policy framework favorable to FDI, notably in the ICT sector. At 20 percent of GDP, “ it has one of the world’s highest net inflows of FDI, second only to Sweden” (Aubert & Reffers 2003, p. 15). Another comparable country is Chile that has, through selective use of knowledge and innovation, created niche areas in agriculture and natural resources. Following Chile’s experience, poor countries such as Bangladesh can adopt a ‘low’ or low technological intensity ‘route’ to development in order to enhance their competitiveness in commercializing knowledge.

Kaplinsky et al (2010) give innovation the central role in the global knowledge and look at the Mode 2 knowledge paradigm from a slightly different perspective. They use their own terms – Innovation 1 and Innovation 2 – which share some of the Mode 1 and Mode 2 characteristics in terms of global techno-scientific innovations and their role in bringing about socio-economic development as well as how the poor economies of the world can play a ‘catch-up’ with the developed North. They are of the view that techno-scientific chasm (80 and 20 percent between the North and South, respectively) cannot be bridged altogether; what can be realistically achieved is to reduce the gap. They make some prescriptions in this regard. The low income economies, in addition to striving to improve their scientific and technological edge through increased spending on higher education and

research, can target low income products that have market and consumers in many other low income countries. As for example, China has created market niches in the developing countries through products that are affordable to consumers in the low income economies. Besides, countries that are not able to compete with the developed countries may attempt to combine low technology with sophisticated knowledge or rely on products that can solely use local technology. Herbal medicine in India and alternative treatment in China may be cited as examples of the latter.

The working of the knowledge economy informed by Mode 2 knowledge is dependent on certain ethos or conditions such as “networks at different hierarchical levels,” both nationally and internationally; “new forms of organizations involving ... cooperation, polarization, and relations between the public and private sectors;” developed human capital that requires higher degrees or level of education (Aubert & Reffers 2003, p. 9). Taking these at least in their spirits, if not literally, we can put them together in a workable framework: the resource-poor developing countries can create, through international cooperation and techno-scientific network, niche areas that may collectively be able to compete with any single developed nation. Such networks of combined forces may better work within the ambit of existing political blocs of the poor countries such as SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), and the countries of the region can cooperate on identified techno-scientific fields to give them a combined edge in the global knowledge market through innovations created cooperatively or through networks. Signs appear to be visible there, and the recently established South Asian University in New Delhi as a SAARC initiative may align their existing facilities, expertise, and intellectual outputs to form a network of techno-scientific collaboration that may work on Gestaltian philosophy and offer a combined techno-scientific and intellectual clout to compete with the superiority of any single country of the West. Although it may sound idealistic, similar collaborations between the rich-poor nations, based on healthy cooperation, may even work to the advantage of the poor nations. In this context one point is pertinent: knowledge that is instrumental in developing human capital that in turn helps build techno-scientific superiority in the global knowledge market is ‘nonexclusive’ and its ownership is difficult to establish. It is a ‘nonrival’ good as its use by one person does not preclude its use by others. Once it is codified, the poor nations can take advantage of it by educating the people to be creative, innovative, and enterprising. Even the poor countries may not need to create own higher education infrastructure as in the globalized world the frontiers of knowledge as well as of higher education have become more permeable. King and

McGrath (2002) even recommend the possibility of using the service of the members of the 'diaspora' to strengthen the poor nations' knowledge commercialization regime.

Subotzky (1999) focuses on certain aspects of the Mode 2 knowledge paradigm that inform higher education curricular and pedagogical practices having greater relevance to developing countries. As higher education has diversified through massification and universal admission, it is to address the diverse needs of an increasing complex society. Necessarily, the higher education curriculums need to be problem-oriented as well as transdisciplinary to serve such varied purposes. This researcher argues that the curriculums followed in developing countries are de-contextualized and yet to be problem-oriented. As well as, they are not built on partnership or transdisciplinarity. The fact that Mode 2 knowledge favours a problem-based curriculum based on disciplinary collaboration, it suits, according to Subotzky (1999, p. 420), the problem-prone developing nations such as South Africa: "It is for these reasons that South African analysts recognized the potential of a Mode 2 orientation [sic] improve the effectiveness of programmes directed towards national development goals."

As evident, the value of intangible capital that consists in "the training of the labor force and the applied knowledge acquired through domestic R&D or by tapping into the global stock of knowledge" (Aubert & Reffers 2003, p. 10) has risen considerably in the new knowledge regime. And the fact that some less developed countries such as Ireland or a developing country like India has been able to catch up with the developed countries in certain domains of the global knowledge market further points to how poor countries without sufficient infrastructure can achieve similar development through appropriate investment in higher education and research. Indeed, all the key pillars of knowledge based economies (for example, an economic and educational model that favours creation, dissemination and use of knowledge, skilled workforce developed human wealth, and a well-developed innovation system able to tap into the stock of global knowledge) are directly related to higher education and research. However, Aubert and Reffers (2003) sound caution on investing heavily on the higher education sector alone to create a knowledge economy as it "requires going well beyond the development of one or several specialized sectors" (Aubert & Reffers 2003, p. 13). In fact, in order to achieve a robust knowledge economy, the key pillars of the knowledge economy paradigm – higher education, research, innovation strategy, skilled labour force, and an efficient ICT network – need to work in tandem. At the same time knowledge economy strategies must be

adapted to individual countries' needs in view of their specific socio-economic situations and level of development. In this regard, "... it might be preferable to speak of knowledge for development [K4D] strategy rather than a knowledge economy strategy, a notion that better suits developing countries' perspectives" (Aubert & Reffers 2003, p. 14).

### **2.3.3.5 Commentary**

In fact, the emergence of knowledge economy and the new mode of knowledge production have put humanities knowledge and its utilitarian value in a new perspective. While the employability of humanities graduates traditionally suffers due to a lack of tangible skills, such a new development in a utilitarian line has led to further deterioration in terms of their employment prospects. The votaries of the humanities have to prove the relevance of their disciplines anew, and in this regard their main responsibility is to align or reconfigure humanities knowledge as an economic force in its own right. Also, they will need to train and prepare their students as knowledge workers; as knowledge is marketable nationally and internationally, they will have to cope with the internationalisation as well as commercialisation trends of knowledge. Moreover, knowledge should be produced in interdisciplinary and collaborative settings with application as well as problem solution in mind that in turn requires adjusting to innovation and competition, which techno-scientific knowledge is better attuned to cope with.

However, the above challenges have opened up new opportunities as well; once the humanists can make creative and innovative use of them, they can greatly enhance the relevance of their disciplines in the prevailing utilitarian situation. As noticed, intellectual activities, primarily in humanities spheres, have, as manifested through an increase in book publications, increased phenomenally. The culture and creative industries have expanded through popular music, mass media, mass production of movies, cultural tourism, museums, heritage, war memorials, theme parks, and image productions that feed the burgeoning advertising industry. Above all, the cultural sector has emerged as the symbolic currency that carries social value as well as augments life chances, cultural and social sophistication. Literature, languages, philosophy, history and similar humanities disciplines, by virtue of their closer social and human interconnectedness, have deeply involved themselves in life and humanity. They are increasingly used as a means of understanding the human situation in an increasingly turbulent world. Also, intellectual activities have diffused through mass higher education and at the same time the

humanities, through increased access to higher education, are accomplishing an invaluable socio-political mission or acting as a conduit for socio-economic transformation. The prospect of employability of humanities graduates as creators and transmitters of culture is gaining momentum. Humanities graduates are also in demand to act as cultural intermediaries who work as teachers, journalists, media personalities, museum curators, tour guides, managers and organisers of culture related businesses.

Ostensibly, humanities knowledge, theoretical in nature, is not able to compete with scientific and technological knowledge on an equal footing. However, in view of the above prospects, the humanities can be aligned towards meeting utilitarian needs using their potentials. Innovation is a vital factor in a knowledge economy situation which in turn is contingent upon creativity and imagination, two hallmark attributes of the humanities. As well as the humanities are mainly idea-based and innovative ideas sell in the knowledge market. Innovation and ideas are not limited to techno-scientific fields only, and the humanists can exploit their creativity and imagination to generate new ideas that may have tangible value in the current knowledge economy paradigm. As well as knowledge as 'human capital' is not discipline specific, and hence humanities knowledge can be as valuable as that acquired through the sciences and technology. While science and technology transform human beings into human capital by equipping them with tangible as well as directly usable skills and knowledge, the humanities (if Newman's and Flexner's views are taken into consideration) can enhance the use value of human potential by infusing in them superior intellectual attributes. And the social transformational power of the humanities through application and social contextualisation that in turn impacts on people's lifestyles, tastes, and consumerism is able to contribute to economic growth.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

As evident from the above deliberations in historical, theoretical, epistemological, and contextual perspectives, the relevance of higher education in general and humanities education in particular is an important academic issue that has drawn scholarly and intellectual attention for centuries. Verily, the issue of higher education and its relevance deserves further research and scholarly attention. Despite detachment shown by highbrow scholars towards using humanities knowledge for socio-economic gains, either in tangible or abstract terms, it has performed vital functions in bringing about moral, ethical, intellectual, aesthetic, socio-cultural, and economic development. These core readings

provide us with avenues to explore in the current socio-economic situation the relevance of humanities education affected by paradigmatic shifts in the production, dissemination and use of knowledge. Although this Chapter, in its multifaceted focus, dwells on the issue of relevance in its wider world perspective, it provides us with sufficient insights to improve the relevance of humanities higher education in Bangladesh context.

To sum up, the above deliberations have brought to the surface a number of assertions as to how the humanities can remain relevant in the current higher education environment: higher education in the humanities sector can prepare students for various professions that have tangible utilitarian value; it can bring about intellectual enhancement that does not have any end beyond itself; act as an agent of social change; help form national taste, cultural and intellectual tradition; preserve and transmit national heritage – both cultural and intellectual; promote national unity and cohesion; nurture as well as preserve democratic value; help promote internationalism; can help solve socio-political, ethico-moral problems; deliver social justice by forming an egalitarian society; can help accelerate social mobility, dislodge entrenched class structure, ensure social equilibrium; perform utilitarian objectives by adding to different professions. Using all these assertions, mainly inductively as well as analogically, the issue of relevance will be applied to Bangladesh situation, to echo Arndt (2007) again, in its political, ethical, vocational, spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic dimensions.

Any research endeavour is not conducted in an arbitrary way. It needs to be carried out in a credible and honest manner in order to reach a convincing outcome. It needs to follow acceptable norms and practice which in turn need to abide by processes and procedures that are transparent and scientifically, empirically driven and ethically motivated. Before embarking on carrying the research endeavour to its next major phase, we need to present a narrative of the research process or how the research project was planned and carried out. The next Chapter will deal with this process which, in research parlance, is called methodology.

# Chapter 3

## Research Methodology: A Narrative of My Research Journey

The researcher is the research instrument who engages in a transactional process, recognizing that the process is ethics-in-action (Randor 2001, p. 30).

According to Silverman (2005), the methodology chapter of a research project is not, as usually understood, a routine task that simply aims at earmarking some set purposes according to a fixed *pro forma*. To him, the methodology part is a narrative of an intellectual expedition which the researcher undertakes; it is “about the history of ... research including ... response to the various difficulties and dead ends that we all experience” (Silverman 2005, p. 306). It is in general an “approach to studying research topics” in which the researchers talk about the “actual course of [their] decision making rather than a series of blunt assertions” (ibid). In the postmodern context, Lichtman (2010) terms the whole research endeavour a personal journey, a creative nonfiction, which, as she recommends, the researcher should even consider narrating in the first person. In line with Silverman’s and Lichtman’s ‘postmodern’ prescription, in this Chapter I will outline an honest account of my conduct of the research with special attention to the following questions:

- (1) How did I go about my research?
- (2) What overall strategy did I adopt and why?
- (3) What design and techniques did I use?

(Adapted from Silverman 2005, p. 305).

### 3.1 Interpretive approach

In this study, I have adopted a qualitative methodology which is “fundamentally interpretive” (Liamputtong 2009, p. xiii). In this interpretive study, I have striven to arrive at outcomes on the basis of experts’ as well as my own analysis, criticism, explanation, evaluation, observations of and opinions and reflections on the phenomenon under study. This is in conformity with Randor’s argument (Randor 2001, p. vii) as to the nature of interpretive research: “What constitutes interpretive research is the explicit recognition of the researcher being engaged in the act of interpretation from the beginning of the research

process to the end. [The] ... approach to research the interpretive way is driven by the belief that, at its best, [it] ... has explanatory power and can inspire through offering illuminating insights into human situations.” He talks about introspective awareness that can help enhance the quality of interpretive ‘acts’. The changed theories of cognition recognise the value of an interpretation of experience (rather than a direct reflection of the physical world) in the construction of knowledge. As Randor (2001, p. 3) puts it, “We interpret experience through the filters of existing knowledge and beliefs” and construct personal meanings in the context of the ideas, thoughts and beliefs and values “provided by the social and cultural environment” in which we live. Thus this approach is a useful means of understanding socially constructed knowledge and ideas as well as social life through interpretation. People make do with their existence on the basis of the interpretation of their own experience as well as that of the behaviour and experience of others. When human beings act on the basis of their interpretation of the activities of others, this means that meaning interpretations are causal for them.

While an interpretive approach can take different theoretical contours, in my thesis I have used the one known as hermeneutics. It is in keeping with the interpretive and non-positivistic nature of my research project. Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation of texts in which written or spoken language is analysed to reveal the meaning in a phenomenon (Liamputtong 2009; also, Thomas & Brubaker 2008). Through a theoretical framework hermeneutics takes into consideration the context and original purpose of an action and attempts to interpret its meaning in its cultural context where it is originally created as well as where it is subsequently interpreted. Originally meant to interpret scriptural texts, it subsequently came in its broadened form to interpret human action in context.

Notably, in hermeneutics two important features dominate, and they are: (a) language is instrumental in the act of understanding; (b) the “context, particularly the historical context, is used as a framework for understanding” (Liamputtong 2009, p. 7). In fact, it endeavours to understand the nature of human beings as well as the meaning human beings bestow upon this world through interpretation by using language in social context. Human beings and the world of being or the world experienced are integral to each other; the exponents of hermeneutics attempt to make sense of any mundane phenomenon through interpretation and understanding by using language. Through this process researchers come to know how human beings lend meaning to “experience, behaviour and action” (ibid, p.

8). This shows that language, understanding and interpretation are interlinked. As Liamputtong (2009, p. 8) puts it, language turns thought into a written ‘format’ so that it can be understood; and “once it turns into a written text, it transforms into an object of interpretation.” Also, written texts can “only be understood within the historical context that pervades human understanding. And through historical context, understanding becomes meaningful” (ibid).

In the overall scheme of my research design, I have followed Randor’s “hermeneutic circle” (Randor 2001, p. 36) that involves the “process of interpretation, reflection and reinterpretation leading to an understanding.” Based on this deliberation, we can deduce the following characteristics of interpretive design: the researcher collects and analyses data; she “repeats the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting until a picture emerges worthy of presentation” (ibid; also, Dey 1993).

### **3.2. Data Collection**

Written texts such as “lived experiences written in diaries, journals, protocol writing ... descriptions in literature” are an important source of data collection within hermeneutics (Liamputtong 2009, p. 8); as a research methodology, it is “employed extensively in the unobtrusive methods where researchers attempt to understand written texts from published materials [newspapers, magazines], reports [government policy papers, health records], and private documents [personal diaries and wartime memoirs]” (ibid). Accordingly, for data I mainly relied on printed materials as well as the works of existing theorists in the field and the body of knowledge scholars and researchers have produced and published in books, monographs, and scholarly journals. Libraries, Internet resources, newspapers and physical visits to Bangladesh were the main sources of such materials. Also, I consulted official documents, policy documents, both in their primary and secondary sources, produced by different education commissions and regimes. Published and unpublished dissertations in the relevant field were also an important source of data collection.

I looked at the phenomenon under study – the relevance of humanities higher education in Bangladesh – from the perspectives of, to quote Maxwell (1996, p. 69), “people ... settings, events, and processes.” Using “purposeful sampling” or “criterion-based selection” (Maxwell, p. 70), I selectively used authors who are expert in the area; as well as I made use of settings, events, times that provided me with information about the subject

under study. Notably, in qualitative research the main benefits of purposeful sampling, according to Maxwell (1996, p. 71), are: it enables “achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, individuals, or activities selected;” it allows selecting “sample to deliberately examine cases that are critical for the theories that [the researcher] began the study with, or [the researcher] subsequently developed” (ibid, p. 72; also, Liamputtong 2009).

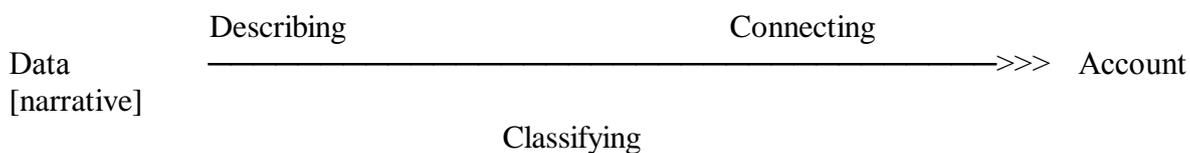
In collecting data I made maximum use of the Monash University library, which is a rich reservoir of printed data such as books, monographs, journals. However, my full-time teaching job at the Department of English, Taif University, Saudi Arabia, precluded taking full advantage of such materials. I managed to overcome this problem, to some extent though, through electronic access to data. Although limited, some books and most journals of the Monash Library were available electronically. Another important source of data collection was Questia, the US-based online library. Being a paid subscriber, I had electronic access to its materials, mainly books and journals. However, one limitation was that most of its publications are outdated. Of course, the Internet itself was another source of data, and through the Net I could get access to a number of journals, newspapers, and similar materials.

Also, I made a number of visits to Bangladesh during my candidature. However, the problem was that the area of my research was the least explored in Bangladesh which, in the very first place, is poor intellectually in terms of publications and research output. I could get hold of only a few books, most of them in Bengali (however, my translation skill was of immense help in this regard), from the local book shops. My visits to Dhaka Central Public Library, Dhaka University Library, National University Library, the Asiatic Society Library hardly proved successful. Even my visit to Dhaka University’s Institute of Education and Research yielded little result. The dearth of materials on Bangladesh higher education was a real stumbling block. Local newspapers were the main hope and I used to sift through newspapers for relevant articles almost daily.

### **3.3. Data analysis**

Data analysis means understanding raw data and then organising them in a purposeful manner taking resort to appropriate evidence; or it means subjecting data to “evidence-based interpretations”, which “entails classifying, comparing, weighing and combining material [obtained during data collection] to extract the meaning and implications, to

reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (Rubin & Rubin 2005, p. 201). In analysing data for the purpose of creating a cohesive narrative I followed Dey’s model (Dey 1993, p. 53) which stands as follows:



As Dey (1993, p. 30) puts it, data analysis “involves breaking data down into bits, and then ‘beating’ the bits together. ... It is a process of resolving data into its constituent components to reveal its characteristic elements and structure.” It is a circular process of describing, classifying and then connecting them together. Actually, the objective of data analysis in qualitative research is to extract meanings from the social phenomenon we research and this act of extracting meanings involves describing the phenomenon under study to locate its characteristic elements, classifying these elements according to their distinctive nature and then connecting them together in an analytically useful way. This three-tier process results in the re-conceptualization of the data which in turn helps emerge a fresh picture of the phenomenon we deal with.

Adopting the above three-step process, I analysed data for my project that deals with the relevance of humanities higher education in Bangladesh. The phenomenon under study is socio-political and cultural in nature; and as such it is necessarily contingent upon socio-political and cultural context of the region which has been influenced and shaped over time by the motives and intentions of rulers and politicians, bureaucratic and academic administrators as well as by prevailing socio-political and cultural aspirations and expediencies. In my project, in analysing data I subjected these factors to a close descriptive scrutiny in order to expose their underlying meanings and designs that have shaped the higher education system of Bangladesh and farther afield. The types of data I analysed dealt with the theoretical perspectives of higher education, existing knowledge and scholarship of higher education, the history of higher education in the world, the history of higher education in Bangladesh *vis-a-vis* the intentions of the actors – the pre-British Muslim rulers, British and Pakistani colonizers who had kept the region under occupation for about eight centuries. Also, such data dealt with policy perspectives as well as different socio-political and cultural contexts and phenomena – Islamisation, colonisation, indigenous-isation, post-Bangladesh uncertainty and instability. I described

the data and identified their constituent elements; then I classified them into categories according to their respective traits and attributes. I carried out such a classification with a view to ascertaining their respective position and relative values and importance across the whole spectrum of the project under study. After classifying the data according to their constituent elements (data related to, for example, past history and their relative values, data related to policy uncertainty, data related to the socio-economic relevance of higher education), I brought them together by ascertaining their rightful place in the whole project as well as their contribution to the overall picture of the Bangladesh higher education sector.

Notably, classification is always guided by research objectives. The researcher selects her/his research topic, defines the question, and starts searching for data, and initially she/he collects such data without any attention to separate categories they belong to. Obviously, the research project does start as a sum total of data all of which are not essential for the purpose of reaching the ultimate research outcome. Here arises the question of selectivity – some data are of utmost need while others are peripheral. At the same time some of the data are not needed at all and hence these need to be excluded. This process of sifting data to separate them on the basis of their relative importance (or lack of it) taking into consideration the research phenomenon under study starts from the very beginning of the research project. In the case of my project, I read a lot of materials initially on the basis of their face value or outward importance. As I read them, I attempted to determine their relevance to the project. I ascertained their relevance and kept those which I needed; I excluded those which I thought I would not need. Notably, I maintained different files to keep those important or related materials. I put tags on the files such as ‘history of higher education’, ‘theories of higher education’, ‘history of Bangladesh higher education’, ‘higher education in Bangladesh in its policy perspectives’, ‘current status of higher education in Bangladesh’, and so on.

Basically, the above are the different categories I classified data into. But such categories were not arbitrary. I determined such categories on the basis of the different recognizable characteristics the data possessed. In a research project, classification is not an end in itself; it helps us identify data categories that have a designated space in the research project as well as fit into our research objectives or the overall social reality we deal with. We categorise data into parts or bits in order to ascertain their due place in the wider puzzle of our research. Then we connect these together to get a completed picture of the puzzle.

Such categories help us analyse data and fit them into their respective places in the wider puzzle of the research project.

So, making connection between the data was the next step. The qualitative data are made up of concepts which are likened to the building blocks of our analysis. To build the research framework these building blocks need to be joined together, and for this we need to put 'mortar' between the blocks. Connecting concepts, according to Dey (1993), is the analytical equivalent of putting mortar between the building blocks. Through classification I laid the foundation for significant connection. I determined how these blocks or concepts interacted for the purpose of making the building. I identified associations between different concepts. After classifying I examined regularities, variations and singularities in data. I identified a pattern within the data, and by looking for correlations between different categories as well as looking for patterns I tried to achieve a fresher perspective or clearer picture of the data. In other words, through classification I discovered regularities as well as variations and exceptions. I compared data to discover common factors in order to identify variations. By examining regularities and association between concepts and by identifying variations for exclusions I connected or put back the relevant pieces of data together. Thus by means of a structured narrative of data of the phenomenon under study, by classifying the data into bits and by putting back the bits together I reconceptualised a complete analytical picture of the subject under study.

### **3.4 The issue of rigour**

In its import as a concept, rigour in qualitative research is similar to validity (the truthfulness of findings) and reliability (stability or consistency of findings) in positivist science. It is used as a means to evaluate qualitative research. As qualitative research is subjective, descriptive, context-dependent and language focused, there are legitimate concerns as to its validity and reliability which quantitative research is able to conveniently achieve. As Liamputtong (2009, p. 19) puts it, "Now, the major debate is centred around the issue of validity. Positivists researchers often criticise qualitative research as lacking in validity, and hence qualitative research findings have been seen as unreliable." Here arises the question of rigour which can lend validity and reliability to qualitative research; and according to Tobin and Begley (2004, p. 390), "Rigour is the means by which we demonstrate integrity and competence, a way of demonstrating the legitimacy of the research process. Without rigour, there is a danger that research may

become fictional journalism, worthless, as contributing to knowledge.”

Obviously, because of its subjectivity, culture specificity, “socially constructed reality”, the outcome of qualitative research “cannot be measured, though it can be interpreted” (Liamputtong 2009, pp. 20-21); nor can qualitative data be tested by means of “rules and standards based on assumptions of objective reality and positivist neutrality” (ibid, 21). These factors have seriously undermined the “value of qualitative enquiry as an advancement of knowledge” (ibid). This has prompted qualitative researchers to devise criteria to measure the merits of their research. Liamputtong (2009, p. 21; also, Lichtman 2010) refers to four criteria developed by researchers that translate from quantitative terms to qualitative terms thus: “internal validity to credibility [authenticity], external validity to transferability [applicability], reliability to dependability and objectivity to confirmability.”

### **3.4.1 Credibility and authenticity**

Qualitative research deals with multiple realities and such realities are constructed by human beings in their own contexts; and this requires that representations of reality result from experience that is ‘plausible’ (Liamputtong 2009, p. 21). Credibility is also understood as authenticity, which implies that the research is trustworthy and its findings can be trusted. Researchers, such as Liamputtong for example, think such trustworthiness can be achieved through faithful and accurate presentation of participants’ views upon which the researcher bases his explanation. In my case, there was no participant involvement, and as such I tried to achieve credibility by presenting other critics and authors’ views without any distortion and as faithfully as possible.

### **3.4.2 Transferability and applicability**

Transferability refers to whether the research findings are generalisable or can be applied to a context different from the one they were conducted. However, in the case of generalisability of qualitative research findings, it is mainly theoretical or analytical. It means that “theoretical knowledge obtained from qualitative research can be applied to other similar individuals, groups, or situations” (ibid, p. 22). In this aspect, my research seems to possess generalisability in that its outcome, by virtue of its being based on authoritative theories and knowledge, can be applied to any situations or context with minor contextual modifications.

### **3.4.3 Dependability**

Dependability or reliability is achieved through a fit between the research findings and the data from which the former are derived. This requires of the researchers to make the process of researching logical, accountable as well as traceable through proper documentations. As Liamputtong (2009, p. 22) puts it, “Dependability is linked with the terms ‘decision’ or ‘audit trail’. The researchers document in detail the choices of their methodology and the methods of data collection, and establish ‘coherent linkages between the data and reported findings’. This audit trail allows readers to examine the adequacy of the research process.” Given the fact that the findings of my research project are verifiable or auditable through the bibliography and references, it can be safely assumed that they are authentic which makes them reliable.

### **3.4.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability or objectivity means research findings do not result from sheer imagination or assumptions of the researchers, but are ostensibly linked to the data. Also, it means it has not been blemished by researchers’ personal biases, whims, interests and perspectives. As a researcher, I have tried, as far as possible, not to get influenced by biases or personal idiosyncrasies. I have taken utmost care so that my own analysis of the data does not get contaminated by imagination or similar subjective proclivities. I have been able to achieve this objective by allowing my findings to flow from the evidence-based data I have dealt with.

However, it should be borne in mind that the issue of reliability and validity in qualitative research needs to be seen flexibly. It is not possible for qualitative researchers to work on principles followed by positivist researchers, and in this regard Lichtman (2010, p. 222) refers to how in the new millennium the shift is towards “researchers’ role”, “success in communicating”, richness of details and “convincing arguments” from credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The safest way is to work with ‘attentiveness’ so that research findings as well as research processes are not marred by researchers’ insincerity, sloth, untidiness, lack of attention to details.

### **3.5 The issue of ethics**

The issue of ethics deals with the underlying morality which the conduct of research entails. It means respect and care for others; maintaining privacy and confidentiality; protecting others' freedom, sensitivity and sensibilities; not showing bias or prejudice that may influence the findings of the research. As Liamputtong (2009, p. 32) puts it, "Ethical issues have become an essential aspect of research. This is more so in qualitative research because of the close interaction and relationship between the researcher and the participants as well as the unstructured and unpredictable nature of qualitative research methods."

In my thesis, the issue of ethics has minimum implications or involvement. It is because I did not have interaction with any individuals; I relied on and worked from printed or published materials only, and most of such data sources were available publicly. In situations where the issue of copyrights was involved, I respected all the relevant laws. In the case of my research, the issue of ethics mainly applies to analysing data in the most honest and truthful manners as a "researcher is expected to analyse data in a manner that avoids misstatements, misinterpretations", or fraudulent practices (Lichtman 2010, p. 57). I carefully guarded myself from falling into such traps; and in the event of any bias or prejudice that could arise out of personal attachment or alignment to the research topic, I was careful so that I could keep myself as much objective as possible.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

As seen from the above deliberation, this methodology Chapter narrates my personal intellectual engagement with my research project. It was at times smooth while at other times it had humps and bumps. To me, it looked like a new creation that entailed all the travails or pangs of giving birth to a creative progeny. When I finished the last data chapter, I really felt the pangs of giving birth to a creative baby was over; I felt contented in that I was able to create something that might be rewarding. As a product of my own intellectual labour, I tried to remain as faithful as possible to its birth processes. I took all possible care and precautions to keep it uncontaminated from any extraneous influences in the form of bias, sloth, prejudice and subjectivity. I worked on it part-time over a number of years; although its status as a scholarly creation may be contested, my sincerity towards its process of creation, which is basically called methodology, should not be questioned. My honest intention having been known, now it is time to set off on the actual research

journey, and as a sequel to exploring the issue of relevance, the next Chapter will examine the state of higher education in Bangladesh in its historical, policy and doctrinal perspectives.

# Chapter 4

## Higher Education in Bangladesh

This Chapter will deal with higher education in Bangladesh in its historical, policy and doctrinal perspectives. The main objective of the Chapter is to situate the research topic in the context of Bangladesh as well as to take clues as to how the issue of relevance can be extrapolated as well as contextualised taking into consideration the local socio-economic, politico-cultural and intellectual particularities.

### 4.1 A historical perspective:

In historical perspective, higher education in Bangladesh has its root in the wider higher education system of India. Until 1947, the year of India's freedom from British rule, Bangladesh was politically part of India, and to understand its current characteristics, structure, status and, above all, its growth and development, a historical overview spanning from the earliest time to 1947 is worth considering. The Pakistan period from 1947 to 1971 and the Bangladesh period since independence will form a separate era.

#### 4.1.1 The ancient Hindu and Buddhist periods (sixth century BC – 10<sup>th</sup> century AD)

Greater India can boast of a higher education system that “dates back to the days of antiquity” (Basu 1944, p. 1). The representative institutions of the period in question were *Ashramas* (also called *Gurukulas*, they imparted instruction on “the Vedas, the rituals, literature, astronomy, medicine and other subjects” [Basu 1944, p. 2]) and *Parishads* (originally assemblies of learned Brahmins), and in terms of the nature of knowledge they used to impart the former were known to have resembled modern-day colleges and the latter universities. The *Parishads*, although their main functions were ecclesiastical, performed teaching responsibilities through teachers and learned scholars considered competent to pronounce judgment on the attainments of students approaching for academic recognition or certification. As assemblies of learned Brahmins and scholars who had ample facilities for providing education and learning, they used to draw aspiring students who wanted to study different branches of knowledge including literature, astronomy, and

medicine. That was how the “*Parishads* formed the nucleus of something corresponding to modern universities” (Basu 1944, p. 3; also, Knowles 1977).

In the Buddhist period, the *Parishads* actually developed into universities in the mediaeval European sense of the word (Basu 1944, p. 3). Shaped under the casteless egalitarian ideology propagated by Buddhism, the *Parishads* transformed themselves into Buddhist *Viharas* (monasteries) and became true seats of higher learning imparting “corporate education” to all, including lay believers (Knowles 1977, p. 2020). Many of them were like modern-day colleges while some others resembled universities of our day with respect to their number of students and teachers as well as subjects studied and intellectual rigour. The latter’s curriculum paralleled the European *trivium* – grammar, logic, and rhetoric; and *quadrivium* – arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music (Samuel 1983, p. 4; also, Jose 1993). And by the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD India could boast of as many as 500 of them and a good number of these monasteries “gradually emerged as great centres of learning attracting students from all over India as well as from foreign countries” (Jose 1993, p. 101).

Jose (1993; also, Dongerkery 1967; Siddiqui 2008) records that Bengal, now comprising Bangladesh and India’s West Bengal, had some of these internationally renowned seats of higher learning. These universities had highly developed curriculums in several areas such as astrology, astronomy, medicine, surgery, and Vedic philosophy. With the revival of Hinduism in the tenth and eleventh centuries, some important seats of higher learning flourished in Bengal, and the universities at Nadia and Navadvip attained recognition all over India because of their academic excellence and reputation.

#### **4.1.2 The Muslim period (10<sup>th</sup> century- 1757 AD)**

Despite initial setbacks the seats of Hindu and Buddhist learning suffered at the advent of Muslim reign, with Muslim supremacy consolidated, a new brand of education propagated through *madrasas* or religious colleges took hold. These *madrasas* established at different places of India emerged as famous “seats of Mohammedan learning” (Basu 1944, p.12). Similar Muslim educational centres grew at different locations of Bengal such as Gaur, Pandua, Sonargaon, Dhaka, Murshidabad, Rajshahi, Chittagong, and Rangpur. The University Education Commission of India (1948-49) acknowledges the contribution of Mohammedan rulers to education and learning and makes mention of such colleges and their curriculums: “The curriculum of these colleges ... included grammar, rhetoric, logic

and law, geometry and astronomy, natural philosophy, metaphysics and theology while poetry was a source of pleasure to all. Most of the important institutions attempted to specialize in one or more branches of knowledge as Rampur did in logic and medicine, Lucknow in theology and Lahore in astronomy and mathematics. The medium of instruction was mainly Arabic and there were many famous scholars in Arabic, teaching in the institutions of higher learning ...” (cited in Samuel 1983, pp. 6-7).

As evident, although the main thrust of Muslim education was religious, secular subjects were not neglected, and emperor Akbar (1542-1605), to cite some examples, introduced into the curriculum the study of medicine, history, geography, economics, political science, philosophy, astrology, law, and mathematics (Jose 1993). Notably, the education system Muslim rulers introduced in India in the Middle Ages was democratic in theory; however, subsequently the system developed independently without any efforts to get integrated into the indigenous Indian system. Dogmatic in nature, the two systems existed as if they were two parallel lines that never meet (Samuel 1983). Due to this glaring oddity, the two dominant religious entities, the Hindus and the Muslims, adopted disparate educational systems according to their diametrically opposite religious traditions (Siddiqui 2008). Jose points to another important drawback of the Muslim education system in India: “While the Hindu and the Buddhist educational systems have succeeded in attaining world-class stature in producing great universities, great works, and great men, the Islamic educational system has not left a significant imprint on any of the ... areas of educational achievement and excellence” (Jose 1993, p. 107).

### **4.1.3 The British period (1757-1947)**

Although Britain established its political foothold in India through the occupation of Bengal in 1757, direct government patronage for Western higher education commenced in 1835 when the Governor, Lord Bentinck, categorically “committed the government to a policy of encouraging this new system” (Basu 1944, p. 16). Western type of higher education received further fillip when in 1844 the government of Lord Hardinge “promulgated a Resolution in which he laid down that thenceforth employment in public services would, by preference, be given to those who would complete their education in the new type of institutions imparting English education” (ibid, p. 17).

Evidently, greater Bengal led the rest of the Indian provinces in the expansion of modern higher education, and the first institutions for modern higher learning on western model came into being when a college at Serampur and the Calcutta Hindu College were established under private initiative in 1815 and 1817, respectively. In the period from 1835 to 1854, the government, in addition to taking over the management of the Hindu College, established a number of colleges along western lines in Hooghly (1836), Dhaka (1841), Krisnanagar (1845) and Bahrapur (1853). Such a rapid expansion through these colleges necessitated the founding of a university. In 1845, in a letter written to the Government the Indian Council of Education mooted the idea of founding a central university in Calcutta. Again, in 1852 a similar proposal was submitted to the British Parliament praying for “the establishment of a university, as native education was sufficiently advanced for the creation of such an institution” (Basu 1944, p. 22). The same proposal was renewed in the famous 1854-education despatch whose frame of reference envisaged: it was necessary to establish universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras on the model of London University; such universities were to affiliate colleges and institutions where candidates for university examinations could pursue regular courses of studies; no faith-based subjects were to be included for examination as well as awarding degrees. However, denominational institutions that would follow the universities’ prescribed courses of studies were not to be prevented from sending candidates for the university examination (Rahim 1981)

The above dispatch got passed in the Indian Legislative Council as Act II of 1857 that facilitated the founding of “the first modern Indian university” at Calcutta in 1857 (Basu1944, p. 29). For the next half a century it remained an affiliating university with its main responsibility to have been examining students from the colleges affiliated to it, some of them predating it: “Colleges continued to be established all over Bengal, Bihar, Assam and Burma, and Calcutta University stood at the apex of a large system of colleges” (Siddiqui 1997, p. 1).

With the establishment of Dhaka University in 1921, higher education in Bangladesh entered a new phase in history. So far a hinterland of Calcutta University, Eastern Bengal, comprising predominantly a socio-economically as well as educationally backward Muslim populace, got its own institution of higher learning that had a far-reaching impact on the socio-economic, political and cultural uplift of this hitherto neglected region. The *raison d'etre* of founding this university was clearly stated in the Calcutta University

Commission Report: “The chief determining factor in the decision of the government to make Dacca the seat of a University was, doubtless, the desire to accede to the demand for further facilities for the Muslim population who form a vast majority in Eastern Bengal” (cited in Rahim 1981, p. 1). The university formally opened its door to students on July 1, 1921 with three faculties, 12 teaching departments, 1105 students and a teaching staff of 60 members. Its founding concept was liberal and enlightened. It came into being as “a university ... autonomous in the best tradition of the West, particularly Britain. The university, unlike Calcutta, would be unitary, with no affiliation of colleges, would be residential in principal, with Halls of Residence clustered around the university, reflecting the Oxford-Cambridge collegiate system, the Halls replicating, though at a considerable remove, the Oxbridge Colleges” (Siddiqui 1997, p.3).

The University of Calcutta, having teaching as well as affiliating status, played an important role in imparting higher education to Bengalis of Bangladesh even after the creation of Dhaka University in 1921. As an affiliating university it had jurisdiction over the colleges of this region until 1947. It is evident that Bangladesh (East Bengal, later East Pakistan) “inherited a system of higher education which had developed in India, and which gave a prominent role to the colleges, catering to the vast majority of students studying for their first degree of the university” (Siddiqui 1997, p. 2).

## **4.2 Current status of higher education in Bangladesh (from 1947 to present)**

Development of an education system in any country is a continuous process, and it builds on the legacy the past generations leave behind. Following the Indian partition and the creation of Pakistan, of which Bangladesh was a part, it inherited an education system introduced in undivided India: “The British had left a legacy. In brief, education had been planned on Western lines ... . English was to be the medium of instruction and most of the content to be derived from Western liberal arts and sciences. It was to be secular in spirit and it was to be open to all, irrespective of caste and creed ... The emphasis was on higher education. Organised higher education was to filter down to the lower levels ... of the system” (Siddiqui 2008, np).

In the period from 1947 to 1971, the entire university sector in Bangladesh had six universities – four offering general education and the other two technical education in the fields of agricultural sciences and engineering disciplines. Three out of the four general universities, Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi, had affiliating roles with hundreds of tertiary-level colleges affiliated with them. Bangladesh's emergence as an independent state in 1971 had an enormous impact on the system. The country's first ever political freedom from foreign domination raised inflated hopes and expectations among the people, and the area of higher education was no exception. A UGC report, cited by Siddiqui (1997, p. 6), portrayed the situation thus: the demand for university places increased exponentially due to a number of factors that, among others, included higher education's burgeoning role in the national economy and its presumed social prestige.

Above all, Bangladesh in the early seventies experienced social dislocation due to a deteriorating economy further exacerbated by high inflation and a burgeoning population. It came to be known as one of the least developed countries, which, "paradoxically enough, had inherited a tradition of higher education borrowed from one of the most advanced countries, Britain. The system was of alien mintage, in many ways divorced from the realities of a backward agricultural economy. The University of Dacca, housed in an abandoned capital of sprawling greenery and eye-catching architecture was, in the context of social realities of the day, an exotic plant. Already, under the heat of a crumbling economy in the 70s, the plant was withering. Other members of the system felt the same strain" (Siddiqui 1997, p. 9).

Currently the whole higher education system consists of, as already mentioned, 32 public universities, 54 private universities, and around 1800 colleges that offer undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The sector has expanded, but such expansion that has resulted in falling standards is mainly 'linear', quantitative, not qualitative or 'vertical', 'unplanned' and 'unchecked' and devoid of planning and policy direction. It mainly grew under pressure of population growth, without any well-spelt-out policy to keep enrolment within desirable limits that the system could sustain or without being dictated by manpower needs. Such a growth, mainly external and linear, has "brought to the fore the issue of quality, of efficiency, and has sharpened the question of the system's relevance for the nation" (ibid, p. 15). Interestingly enough, this growth pattern does not show any relationship between the job market need, demand for graduates, their skills and the growth of the sectors. The system has grown in a rather unexplained way, even in the face of the

growing unemployment of university graduates: “Paradoxical as it may appear, there is a connection, not easy to explain, between educated unemployment, always on the increase, and a growing demand for higher education” (Siddiqui 1997, p. 54).

University education in Bangladesh seems to have, mistakenly though, a special attraction, and students and parents alike look at it as an ultimate avenue for change as well as conduit for socio-economic mobility. Siddiqui (1997, p. 59) articulates this special charm and fascination which higher education seems to carry:

Paradoxically enough, in a country with population of starving and half-starving millions, with all the basic needs of food, healthcare, housing, income generation remaining unattended, a university has worked as a magic wand. It is as if a university will bring about a change from nowhere. And it cannot be said that the spell cast by the word ‘university’ has lost its potency even today.

This magical charm of higher education seems to boost up, rather artificially, the demand for higher education at tertiary and university level. While expansion is necessary to accommodate new demand necessitated by growth in the job market, need for new skill and expertise for socio-economic development, in the case of Bangladesh higher education such growth seems to have been brought about by sheer populism. Instead of conscious and well-defined policy adoption, ‘ad hocism’ seems to have played a major role. As a result, the growth has been too hasty without any elaborate planning and clear-cut future outlook or any consideration of current reality.

Universities in Bangladesh suffer from a lack of intellectual interaction and coordination between various branches of knowledge, especially between technological and liberal branches of knowledge (BEC 1974, pp. 87-88). Unlike most western universities, those in Bangladesh have grown, academically speaking, in intellectual isolation or segregation from each other. General universities without technical faculties and technical universities without a liberal orientation have become isolated entities without any regard to holistic considerations of the scholarly world. This is why universities are categorized either as general universities, or technical universities or specialized universities. This pattern is quite contrary to the holistic approach to knowledge which, in higher education terms, refers to the wholeness of knowledge. This approach turns them into isolated islands of knowledge rather than a universally held view of knowledge in its wholeness. As a matter of policy, no serious move has been undertaken to bring about any equilibrium between the technical and the general universities.

## 4.2.1 The College Sector

The concept of college education in Bangladesh is as old as the higher education sector itself. What Siddiqui (1997, p. 198) points out as to the importance of the larger college system appears to be pertinent: “We must remember that the tertiary system is not complete without the colleges. While the universities, taken together, constitute the inner circle of the system, the colleges constitute the outer circle. And there are many points where the two circles overlap. The relationship is one of interdependence in some aspects; in other aspects, one of patron and client.” Immediately after partition Pakistan inherited a dual higher education system. All the 58 colleges of the eastern wing, hitherto affiliated to Calcutta University, came under the academic control of Dhaka University and formed the larger sector of Bangladesh’s higher education. This system, which also offers BA, BSc and BCom pass degrees, traditionally bears the major brunt of tertiary level education: “The first thing to note is the quantitative aspect of the picture, which will establish the indisputable importance of the colleges in the total system of HE” (ibid). The whole college sector, administered by the National University (notably, until 1992 the general universities except Jahangir Nagar and Islamic University had control over the colleges as affiliating authorities), consists of 1800 colleges, both government and non-government. The sector enrolled, according to 2001 statistics, 91 per cent of the entire higher education sector (NEC 2003, p. 109).

Siddiqui identifies some trends behind the rapid growth of the college sector. Their number has grown in “direct response to the growth of the Primary and Secondary system”; the growth is “unplanned and unchecked”, the “larger number of students going for general Arts and Commerce subjects, with comparatively fewer opting for a Science course” (Siddiqui 1997, p. 202). Its rapid expansion can be discerned from such staggering statistics: in 1972-73 the number of degree colleges was 200; it increased to 547 in 1991. In 2001, the college sector offering tertiary courses consisted of 1297 colleges of various categories. The same number rose to 1482 in 2003 (NEC 2003, p. 107).

The Pass Course is an important component of the college sector, especially of the non-government colleges. However, this qualification suffers from a serious quality and credibility problem, and this is evident from low pass rates which are anywhere between 20-40 per cent. Poor teaching due to poorly qualified and/or inadequate teachers,

insufficient infrastructural facilities, low admission standards (very often admission is open) contribute to this issue. Nevertheless, the sector grows quantitatively in the backdrop of teeming educated unemployment: “The main driving force that brings an ever-increasing number of students to colleges for a Pass degree is the prospect of a job. In the background of colossal unemployment, and the staggering disproportion between available jobs and the number running after them, the trend is easy to understand” (Siddiqui 1997, p. 207; also, NEC 2003, p. 169).

#### **4.2.2 Some reflections in historical hindsight**

Historically, Bangladesh, having been under foreign domination for more than two centuries, had suffered for lack of an appropriate policy direction as well as misdirected priorities or a misplaced emphasis on lesser or unimportant issues. At a time when Europe was coming out of the darkness of medieval superstition and feudalism through the influence of the Renaissance, the Reformation Movement, the Industrial Revolution and was influenced by many other ground-breaking scientific theories and inventions, the British overlords in India introduced a regressive education system in Bengal. In 1781 they established Calcutta Madrasa, in 1791 the Sanskrit College at Benares and Calcutta Sanskrit College in 1824 to impart religious education to both the Hindus and the Muslims, and this reveals their regressive educational policy that was inspired by political motive: “Needless to say, the British did not set up these ... higher education institutions out of their devotion to Islam and Hinduism. They did so for two reasons. First, to keep the populace appeased by using religion; second, to prevent them from being imbued with rational and scientific thoughts and ideologies of the West as well as to keep them steeped in superstition and fanaticism so that their colonial rule remained intact” (Islam 2001, pp. 25-26; my translation from Bengali). As well as Roy (1998, p. 14; also Samuel 1983, p. 10; Basu 1978) maintains that both these institutions were meant to impart traditional education for the purpose of creating mullahs and Hindu clerics. There was no room for liberal education and rational thinking; the access of progressive knowledge and education was forbidden.

In the same vein, Chowdhury (1997, p. 2; also, Basu 1978) reveals the regime’s sheer administrative motives behind introducing modern higher education in the country: “The British colonizers of Bangladesh, then part of India, ... established new institutions to manage affairs. A cadre of locally educated English-speaking elites was needed to serve as

intermediaries between the British administrators and the local masses.” The much-maligned Macaulay Minute on Education of 1835 that mentioned that English literature was far superior to oriental literature and the purpose of English education in India was to create a band of Indian administrators in the mould of British taste, beliefs and attitudes makes explicit the motive that the British strategy to introduce western education in India was bureaucratically inspired and culturally alienating (Chowdhury 2001).

The British, as Samuel (1983, pp. 10-11) maintains, not only introduced an elitist and exclusive education but also widened, by introducing a “new system of education”, the gap in the education sector already riven by Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist religious doctrines and ideologies as they “did not try to make uniform the ancient, Buddhist, and Mohammedan educational systems”. While its secular nature was welcomed by the less privileged group, and its emphasis on “science and experiment brought a new element into Indian life ... there was no attempt to combine the heritage of ancient, medieval, and modern knowledge and develop a truly national system of education” (ibid).

The Public Instruction Committee formed in 1823 reflected the same colonial mentality, and it recommended that an oriental education be imparted to the natives. The subjects to be studied were Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Oriental Philosophy. *Madrasas* and Sanskrit Colleges were to get government support and patronage, and this “was how the British planned, through their first policy document on education, to keep the natives in the darkness of superstition accumulated over centuries” (Islam 2001, p. 26; my translation; also, Ahmed 2007). Rammohon Roy, the Bengali reformer, opposed this regressive policy in unequivocal terms: “The Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated step to keep this country in darkness if such had been the policy of the British legislature” (cited in Islam 2001, p. 26). This reformer recommended that a modern scientific education system should be introduced incorporating in it such subjects as mathematics, chemistry, physics, physiology, biology, and such other scientific subjects.

While the government kept pursuing its policy of patronizing *madrasa* and Sanskrit education, some secular institutions, the Srirampur College and the Calcutta Hindu College, were established on private initiatives by Hindu philanthropists to impart higher education in the fields of western science, literature, and philosophy. The education these colleges were to impart was humanistic and liberal and reflected the forward-looking mentality of the Hindus. They wanted their community to come out of the stagnancy of

medieval education and to equip people with clear-sighted modern knowledge and creativity. Consequently, “the Hindu community became inclined to western education and very soon it started looking outward, and experienced a reawakening. This resulted in the creation of a conscious middle class imbued with creativity and intellectualism. The ruling Brahmins lost grip over the leadership and this educated class replaced them which in turn created an active and dynamic society” (Roy 1998, p. 15; my translation).

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Hindu intellectuals were trying to rescue the populace from centuries old tradition, conservatism, superstition, and fanaticism through introducing English language and literature, western scientific knowledge, and philosophy, the “Muslim leadership was hidebound to keep its masses confined to the dark alleys of medieval knowledge and education imparted in *madrasas* and other religious schools” (Islam 2001, p. 30; my translation). The role the Calcutta Hindu College played in bringing about a revolution in western thought and rational philosophy to enable the Hindu community to surge ahead of its Muslim counterpart by shedding off orthodoxy is noteworthy. As Ahmed (2007, p. 44) puts it: “The institution was instrumental in disseminating contemporary Western liberal and radical ideas among Hindu students many of whom in later times became leaders of reform movements. In fact, nineteenth century Hindu society was greatly invigorated as a result of the spread of English education.” Hindus, having come in contact with revolutionary western thoughts, ideas and political changes, started questioning blind faith and the existing social system based on caste prejudices.

On the other hand, the Muslim community, because of its inaction and negative attitude to modern European thought, failed to benefit from the changing circumstances that needed a reformed outlook to bring about revolutionary changes in their society. Several attempts (in 1829, 1851 and 1853) to modernize the *madrasa* curriculum by introducing English and western science in Calcutta Madrasa foundered in the face of opposition from students. It is pertinent to mention the general apathy among Muslims towards western education:

Muslims in general failed to appreciate the importance of new forces that were emerging as a result of western ... ideas and new forces that were bound to bring about far-reaching and revolutionary changes in the course of time (Islam 2001, pp. 47; my translation).

On rational grounds a few Muslim reformers, prominent among whom was Syed Amir Ali, spoke against Muslim inaction and conservatism in education. Ali's opposition to age-old *madrasa* education and oriental learning is noteworthy, and in 1882 he declared that it was injudicious on the part of the government to patronise purely oriental education as this nurtured in the populace obscurantism as well as the primitive idea of 'exclusiveness' that antagonised the very intention of British administration. He went to the extent of demanding that *madrasas* be abolished and colleges of English education for the Muslims established in their place (Islam 2001, p. 31). To be precise, the current intellectual poverty of the Muslims in this part of the world can be attributed to their obscurantism as well as their stubbornness (along with mass apathy to modern education) to maintain the status quo by keeping their educational institutions out of the purview of modern science and technology and practical need of society.

### **4.2.3 Impact of colonialism on higher education**

Virtually, every Asian academic institution of the present time "has at its roots one or more of the western academic models" (Altbach 1989, p. 13), and colonialism or neocolonialism, backed by western economic, military, political, scientific, cultural and intellectual superiority, was a powerful influence in this regard. Colonialism as an ideology is "characterized by the domination of country over another through direct rule" (Altbach 1989, p. 14), and education, along with language, is one of the instruments the colonizers utilized to "maintain and strengthen their domination over dependent areas" (Basu (1978, p. 53; also, Altbach 1989). Accordingly, the colonizers did not export their best education systems; the inferior and less expensive institutional models from the metropolitan universities were planted on the colonies. The curriculum and pedagogical practices in the metropole, often presented in watered down format and formal form, lacked proper relevance to the indigenous societies. Accordingly, science and research had an insignificant role in most of the Asian colonial institutions. A "culture of subordination" was in practice, especially in the Indian universities, and "academic freedom was limited and strict controls were kept on staff and students alike" (Altbach 1889, p. 17). Actually, the universities were considered breeding grounds of political resistance and cultural and intellectual renaissance that would destabilize colonial authority.

However, it is argued that not in all the cases western influences on higher education in Asia are imposed by the West as the educational developments and experiences in China, Japan, and Thailand, which had never been colonized, demonstrate. In fact, there has been “considerable interplay between foreign implants and influence and Asian realities. While basic institutional models may be Western, there is a great deal of local impact as well” (Altbach 1989, p. 14). Therefore, in the case of the non-colonized countries the adoption of western institutional models were not deliberately imposed, and that is why these countries did not follow the models of any particular countries. They experimented with different western models and adopted the ones that could best meet their national needs.

In India, the colonial connection and its impact on the education system were of mixed character – both imposition and reciprocity, magnanimity and political and bureaucratic expediency, perceived cultural and intellectual superiority of the colonizers and the inferiority of the colonized. In the early days of colonialism education was not even on the agenda as the principal motive of the colonizer was making commercial profit; when education was introduced mainly administrative interest was the sole motivating factor. Then magnanimity in a patronized form was the guiding factor; English culture, language and literature were considered superior to indigenous ones and an education system that would have civilizing influence through English and western philosophy was encouraged and introduced. The local intellectuals and philanthropists took notice of the modernizing aspects of western education and helped introduce it on their own initiative and efforts. When education became a government policy issue, mainly administrative and political interest got preference. What Basu (1978, p. 59) has to say in this regard is pertinent: “For political, economic, administrative, and cultural reasons, what the British wanted was a small class of English-educated Indians to act ... as ‘interpreters’.” This is one reason why higher education got greater attention and budgetary allocation (70 percent for higher education), and mass education was neglected. This resulted in a “top-heavy and lopsided” education system. Education suffered both quantitatively and qualitatively. Education was literary-based; vocational education was neglected, and “at the tertiary level the number of students in arts colleges was far greater than in professional colleges” (Basu 1978, p. 60). Obviously, there is a marked difference between independent borrowing of educational experience and educational borrowing imposed by outside forces such as colonialism or neocolonialism. India had no alternative but to accept what the British had to dish out while Japan had the independence to choose from different alternatives. Virtually, nowadays all countries in Asia copy or borrow educational experiences from the developed

West, but now they do it with local adjustment as well as based on and motivated by their own needs. As for example, almost all the colonized countries (except Singapore) have reverted as far as possible to their own languages by jettisoning the languages of the colonized as medium of instruction. In this regard, a difference between colonialism as a dominating ideology and international cooperation between sovereign nations needs to be made. If the former colonized countries that include Bangladesh, now politically independent, borrow educational experience and intellectual output from a developed nation, they do it by choice and selectively as well as to their best interest. Almost all the Asian countries, including non-colonized Japan, China, and Thailand, use English in their higher education in a limited way because of their own educational needs. As the circumstances demanded, after the cultural revolution China discarded Russian for English; Vietnam did exactly the same thing in the recent history. Currently, Bangladesh has shifted its dependence to English following its failed experience with the vernacular language; in the same way it freely follows western models in absence of a better regional alternative. Although it adhered to the British higher education model for a long time, now the trend is towards the American model, especially in the areas of business studies.

## 4.2.4 Commentary

The above discussion, in historical perspectives, of the development of higher education in Bangladesh, formerly a province of greater India along with the present-day West Bengal, sheds a lot of important light on how the education system got shaped as well as how different socio-political and religious forces influenced its formation. Also, it delineates how an education system, especially a humanistic tradition, can influence society in moulding intellectual dimension.

Although idealized very often, in Bangladesh and greater India a rich intellectual past really existed. Universities or Buddhist *viharas* like Nalanda and its celebrated Bengali teacher Atish Dipankar, the relics of Buddhist *viharas* at Mainamati, Paharpur [Shompur Môhabiharat at Paharpur was ancient Bangladesh's most famous university; cited in Wikipedia; also, Siddiqui 2008] and Mahastanghar in Bangladesh stand as witness to a rich intellectual past that subsequently got extinct due to religio-ideological rivalry, lack of proper patronage, foreign rules that were insensitive to indigenous culture and tradition, and political manipulation by vested quarters. An education system based on antagonistic

ideals was ultimately grafted on the country's body politic to its incalculable harm.

Siddiqui's observation as to the system's foreign origin and mintage as well as its lack of contextualization is highly pertinent. The system is not only elitist; it has also been grafted on Bangladesh society without any contextual adjustment. The time when the British introduced the system in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century has changed dramatically. Even at its earliest stage it was not context-specific, development and mass-oriented. Its curriculum, the institutions' facilities and physical infrastructures, pedagogical practice, Oxbridge-style collegiate system were introduced in a country smarting under extreme poverty, illiteracy and abysmal ignorance. Although it could produce a band of elite civil administrators, it was hardly geared to meet mass expectations. Noticeably, even now it seems to exist in its original ideals, objectives, and tenor. Undoubtedly, the system has expanded; however, signs of elitism are still there and it has failed to transcend the deep-rooted class structure. Mass expectations are there, but the system has failed to realise such expectations. So, the system needs to be overhauled to give it more local and contextual orientation. It can simply be done by making it more job-oriented; by shedding off esotericism in terms curriculum arrangements; by making course structure and contents localised and problem-oriented. Above all, it needs to be massified to break the existing elitist stance, however, without compromising quality. The curriculum needs to be revamped concentrating on local issues as well as taking into consideration students' socio-economic background and intellectual level. Also, it should aim at serving some vital objectives – empowering the masses both economically, socially, and intellectually. And, obviously, the humanities have a greater role to accomplish in this regard.

In Bangladesh, still the country is weighed down under the burden of an injudicious education system foisted centuries back by hostile as well as intolerant socio-political and religious forces. The Islamic education system made available through *madrasas* by the Muslim rulers and later exploited by the British colonial ruler was an impediment to secularizing as well as modernizing the higher education system. Even when the Hindus accepted the modern Western education introduced by the colonial regime, the Muslims rejected it on religious ground. The aftermath was obvious: they lagged far behind in modernizing their community with severe negative ramifications on their socio-cultural and intellectual development. The system is now virtually polarized between a secular system and a religion-based system.

Despite initially acting noncommittally, the education system the British colonial rulers ultimately introduced was liberal-based, progressive, and secular. The proposal that mooted the need for a university in Bengal recommended an education system that was liberal and secular in nature. And as we see, in practice it was so; the University of Calcutta avowedly excluded religion-based curriculum. The University of Dhaka was founded on the same principle – its founding concept was liberal and enlightened. Such a system of liberal education can help secularize as well as modernize society. It is noticed that the Hindus could modernize themselves and remained ahead of the Muslims simply because of their acceptance of modern liberal education. The Calcutta Hindu College acted as a catalyst for reawakening in the Hindu community due to its secular curriculum dominated by English literature, philosophy, and western thoughts. It is well-documented that the Muslim backwardness was due to their reluctance to embrace modern education, and their rigid or cumbersome religious doctrines precluded secularization as well as modernization of their education system with dire ramifications on their socio-economic and intellectual progress and development. The significant differences that the Hindu and the Muslim communities demonstrate in terms of socio-economic and intellectual flourishing speak for the efficacy of liberal higher education in any society. Liberal and humanities education, free from religio-ideological bias, can help spur development of higher education, which in turn helps modernize as well as secularize society. As well as a scientific and non-ideological higher education system can dismantle class structure and pave the way for social egalitarianism. The Indians, irrespective of their class and caste barriers, benefited from the system, elitist though, and could shed off their age-old caste and class stigma to some extent.

Employment prospects of any disciplines, be they scientific or liberal, depend on how the curriculum is geared to students' and society's express needs and how such needs fare in policy aspects. It is evident from the letter written by the Secretary, the Council of Education, in 1845 that the need for a university arose from the fact that higher education, both liberal and scientific, would prepare students for careers in teaching and administration. The education system was itself geared, to some extent, to prepare students for jobs as well as responsibilities in life. When the Hindu community could realize that education was needed for jobs and career, they started getting modern English education in larger numbers and ultimately they occupied all major posts and positions in undivided India. On the contrary, the Muslim students graduating from Islamic institutions such as Calcutta Madrasa had to suffer from acute unemployment situations. Also, deliberate

government policy promoting employment prospects for educated youths works as a fillip for the development of higher education. It is evident how Indians opted for higher education in English line when Lord Hardinge made English Education mandatory for jobs in public services.

Early Indian higher education was holistic that paid attention to both intellectual and professional needs. Not only that, during Buddhist rule it was egalitarian and all Indians had access to it irrespective of their socio-economic statuses. Even the education system the Muslims introduced was initially rational and holistic, and professional and intellectual needs of students would get equal importance. It lost its intellectual and professional edge only when it took a doctrinal turn. Similarly, the systems of education the Hindus and the Buddhists introduced could maintain their holistic character as long as they remained unaffected by religious hatred, rivalry, and indoctrination. One thing is obvious here that an education system, as long as it can maintain neutrality in terms of religious bias and indoctrination, is able to serve its archetypal mission. As well as a great disservice is done to any education system if it is used to promote ideology and religious doctrine. Pakistan could not evolve a pragmatic education policy because of its rulers' overly zealous manifesto to further state ideology through the education system. The current stagnancy in Bangladesh higher education can be, to a greater extent, attributed to different regimes' religious agenda. Jami (2009, np; also, Kabir 2004) brings to the fore the ideological tussle between the traditionalists and the secularists that has had a serious repercussion on the country's education policy: "The consequence is that instead of creating skilled human resource with a social conscience we entertain an education philosophy based on 'ideological eugenics' dressed up in 'foreign knowledge' competing against 'medieval beliefs and practices'... This has resulted in our half-trained and ill-equipped labour force."

Notably, in present-day Bangladesh the *madrasa* system of education has become a misnomer. In the early days of Muslim rule in India this same system was egalitarian and secular having everyone access to it; the curriculum was holistic and incorporated both intellectual and professional courses. The Mogul empire used this system for a supply of poets, philosophers, and professionals to smoothly run its mighty administration. The same system in Bangladesh and Pakistan has got distorted as well as polarized because of dogmatic turns and transformed itself into an instrument of self-serving ideology devoid of pragmatic ends. And the British sowed the seed of this polarization with an obvious political agenda. What is transparent here is that Bangladesh needs an education system

that is all-encompassing and secular; it needs to innovate a system of higher education that includes the humanities for students' intellectual enlargement and the sciences and technological fields for its material and economic progress. To achieve this end, the system should be freed from ideological and doctrinal manipulation currently it is plagued with. State policy should strive to gear the system for intellectual and professional needs. And all this can be achieved by modernizing the system through the introduction of humanistic and scientific education and instructions.

### **4.3 A policy perspective**

There is a lack of policy direction in Bangladesh's higher education sector (Sadeque 2000, p. 54). Consequently, a number of education commissions formed by various regimes have dealt with this issue without achieving any well thought-out outcomes or policy directions. Majumder (2009) blames the political parties which, without taking into consideration the country's pragmatic needs, attempt to further their political agenda and ideology through forming education commissions that ultimately bear little significance. Roy (1998, p. 11; also, Majumder 2009) points to the futility of forming such education commissions: "The state power changes hands and the new regime starts a commission from the scratch colouring it with its own political agenda. Power changes again and there is another beginning, and the process goes on and on revolving round the same starting point [my translation]." In the backdrop of such policy uncertainty, the following is a synoptic treatment of some of the education commissions different regimes have constituted since 1947 to assess and evaluate the system.

#### **4.3.1 Commission on National Education (CNE) - 1959**

As a sequel to Pakistan's prevailing political instability, in 1958 General Ayub Khan assumed power as head of a military government toppling a civilian government. One of his regime's first steps was to constitute a commission on education. Khan, in inaugurating the Commission on National Education (CNE) in January 1959, urged the Commission members "to evolve a system that would better reflect nation's spiritual, moral and cultural values. At the same time the system should meet the challenge of the growing needs of the nation by assisting development in the fields of agriculture, science and technology ..." (Ahmed 2008; np).

Such political harangues notwithstanding, the CNE's emphasis on higher education is noteworthy. As Siddiqui (1997) puts it, the Commission reversed the tradition of starting its deliberations with higher education and devoted the longest chapter to higher education. However, it opted for a selective higher education when it floated its vision of higher education: "Our recommendation will further see the elimination from higher education of many students who ... drift into university education, without being really fit for it ..." (GOP 1961, p. 19).

CNE's greater emphasis on research – both applied and basic – deserves special mention. In admitting that the universities were places of fundamental research, it did not "discount their importance as being places of applied research, particularly in areas of practical, developmental concern for the nation" (Siddiqui 1997, p. 21). It put emphasis on exposing and orienting students to research practices by introducing research methodology courses at Honours and Master levels, while actual research would be carried on at PhD level. The Commission went on to say that research could be carried on at individual universities as well as at the national level through coordination among different universities.

The CNE was unhappy with the existing teaching universities' affiliating role. It favoured teaching-only universities, the affiliating role being given to select colleges turned into affiliating universities with small number of colleges under their jurisdiction. The CNE favoured the status quo in regard to the role of the affiliated colleges: "... the colleges occupy an extremely important position in our system, and we are anxious that they should continue to do so" (GOP 1961, p.44). However, it favoured stricter affiliation policies for such colleges.

A notable feature of the Commission's proposals was its realization that there should be a fostering relationship between the university and the community in order to minimize misunderstanding that might lead to discontents. Its emphasis on bridging the gap between university and the community is noteworthy and forward looking. It recommended that both students and teachers needed to be involved in community service to redirect their energies for creative and worthwhile purposes.

As to its flip sides, this commission failed to give any policy direction that was forward looking, democratic, progressive, proactive, pro-people, and time-befitting. It was considered restrictive and elitist, especially in the field of higher education (Siddiqui 1997), and in this regard Ahmed (2008, np) mentions that, “... more unacceptable were the recommendations of the commission that were designed to restrict severely the available opportunities for higher education by imposing stricter conditions of enrolment, promotion and by raising the standard of public examinations.” As to its controversy, Siddiqui (1997, p. 20) aptly says that in the country the “tradition of a cheap, permissive and populist higher education was too old and too strong.”

The Commission’s recommendations to increase the duration of the Pass Course degree from two years to three years seemed ambitious given the poor socio-economic situation of the country. Besides, in terms of the relevance of the fledging college sector, it failed to give any definitive direction. In increasing the duration of the course from two to three years, CNE justified its recommendations by saying that it would give a broad understanding of several related disciplines with approximately equal emphasis on each of them. While it intended to raise standards by exposing students to more rigorous course requirements, it did not recommend any measures to make higher education more job-oriented or to make the course contents of Pass courses more job-focused.

Although the political fallout engendered by its controversial recommendations was enormously significant, it proved to be nothing more than a routine exercise by a new regime, which later became a common practice by other subsequent regimes. Its aim was mainly political as well as ideological, which also infected subsequent commissions’ reports and workings. Siddiqui (1997, p. 17) is highly critical about the political mintage of this as well as subsequent commissions formed in Pakistan and Bangladesh: “Commissions are set up by governments, and often their findings and recommendations are coloured by the wishes and fears of their mentors.”

### **4.3.2 Commission on Student Problems and Welfare (CSPW) 1964-66**

CNE’s recommendations caused repercussions and unrest in the country, and in order to assess its fallout the same government instituted in 1964 a commission known as Commission on Student Problems and Welfare (CSPW). Although limited by its terms of

reference, ultimately it produced a report that was “co-extensive with its predecessor” (Siddiqui 1997, p. 28) in terms of its coverage of issues of concern and recommendations: “The close link between the two Reports is what adds to their value, one being sequel to the other” (ibid). It looked more like a routine exercise and it kept its jurisdiction limited to reviewing and evaluating the previous Commission. It did not shed any fresh light on policy direction in terms of relevance and the system’s updating or modernization in view of the needs of the time. According to Roy (1998, p. 21; my translation), “This report, like the previous one, advocated restricting education to the richer section of the country in the name of lifting quality; and its objective was to create an elitist education system.”

### **4.3.3 The New Education Policy (NEP) – 1969**

In 1969 when Ayub Khan stepped down in favour of another military general, the new regime constituted yet another education commission known as the New Education Policy. The rationale behind its constitution could be traced in the prevalent volatile political situation of the country which might have dictated its workings, and it came out with some recommendations for sweeping changes. The most prominent of them was the granting of autonomy to the universities. NEP’s stand on university autonomy and its recommendations for elected student unions were really radical when compared with the proceedings of the previous two commissions. According to Siddiqui, the power of the populace that hastened Ayub’s fall mellowed the ruling military elite and the Commission strove to mollify popular discontent by offering a more democratic education policy (Siddiqui 1997, p. 41). Although the break-up of Pakistan brought about NEP’s premature end, its recommendations influenced the university administration of Bangladesh after 1971. Its historic importance is noteworthy as “it remains an important link between the successive reform proposals of the pre-1971 period and the reform which was achieved after 1971 through the 1973 University Acts” (ibid).

### **4.3.4 Bangladesh Education Commission (BEC) – 1974**

The first government of independent Bangladesh formed an education commission on July 26, 1972 led by Dr Kudrat-e-Khuda, an eminent scientist of the country. Considered a landmark policy paper in the country’s history of higher education, the BEC published its final report in May, 1974. Verily, the formation of an education commission in the context of changed political situation was justifiable. The demand for a scientific, time befitting

education based on equality of opportunity, greater access to the underprivileged sections of the society, job skills, and socio-economic needs of society for development was long felt in the country. The independence gained after a sanguinary conflict created a sense of euphoria among the people of Bangladesh. The government wasted no time in capitalizing on the mood and momentum as well as the euphoria of the moment and instituted a commission that would accomplish this noble but difficult job of finding a panacea for the ills that had plagued the country's education system. As to its main objective, the Preface to the Report envisages: "The Government has constituted this Commission in order to remove the lacking and lapses of the existing education system, to inspire the people for nation building through education and to lead the country in its effort to get equipped with work oriented modern knowledge and skills" (BEC 1974, p. A; my translation).

Chapter 13 of the BEC 1974 (pp. 83-85) entitled Higher Education and Research envisages that higher education in modern Bangladesh society needs to be diversified and it should aim, among other things, at creating in students an awareness about various social and practical problems and a desire to solve them. All possible avenues should be explored to tap human resources and talents so that everyone can have opportunities to develop skills. It acknowledges the importance of research and innovation in the field of higher education, and envisages the fact that the true value and excellence of higher education depends on the dual roles of research and teaching. Also, the BEC 1974 recommends that the education system should be diversified to include in its ambit agriculture, science, humanities, arts, technology, engineering, medicine, commerce, and teacher training.

The BEC 1974 goes on to review the existing state of general higher education at undergraduate and Masters levels imparted in the four universities (Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, and Jahangirnagar) and the colleges affiliated to three of them, other than the last). It bemoans the fact that higher education is devoid of any relevance to society and unable to meet its needs. Higher education graduates, because of their limited skills, aspire and compete for government jobs only, and those who cannot get such jobs because of limited openings end up in a perpetual trap of unemployment, and the high level of educated unemployment is undesirable in a country in which 80% (at the time the BEC 1974 was made public) of the people are illiterate.

It points to the unplanned growth and expansion of higher education; to the disproportionate presence of arts or humanities students in the system. This imbalance is limited not only to disciplinary aspects but also to the delivery of the system. There is a big chasm in respect of the standard and quality of higher education imparted in the universities and affiliated colleges, the latter providing abysmally low quality education.

Against the backdrop of such a precarious state of affairs in the Sector, the BEC 1974 comes up with certain recommendations. Institutions of higher education and their course offerings must be in keeping with the demand for educated manpower and developmental imperatives as well as the economic expediencies of society. There should be a proper balance between science and humanities education in order to achieve holistic knowledge. Care should be taken so that science and technological education do not lead to the creation of mechanical individuals and this can be achieved by offering combinations of humanities and science courses in the same universities. All universities need to be self-contained and full-fledged so that the students can acquire holistic and balanced knowledge in close association with those from different disciplines (BEC 1974, p. 88).

The political changeover through the 1975-putsch brought a premature end to the BEC's recommendations. In 1976, the new regime shelved its recommendations and initiated its own brand of enquiry into the system. Although it is not quite flawless, some of its merits deserve mention:

The UGC (2006, p. 2) praises this Commission thus: “ ... the BEC - 1974 was the most comprehensive review, addressing issues like mission and vision, and considering education as an agent of change ... The commission placed education in a broad national perspective, suggesting continuous quality development and making relevance a key word.”

Siddiqui (2008, np) is appreciative of BEC, and according to him, it is “... something of a landmark in the history of educational thinking. Both idealism and optimism duly qualified by practical considerations, remain the [cornerstone] of this document. It gives both short-term and a long-term view of the nation's education in all its dimensions in a process of reconstruction. Its hopes and projections have not come true but that does not detract from its abiding value, enshrining as it does the educational dream of a nascent nation.” It attempts, at least in spirit, to make higher education more responsive and accessible to a

greater number of the population. Its recommendations are based on unanimity and it takes into consideration the prevailing 'realities'.

The following commissions formed mainly marking or coinciding with regime changes have little value beyond the usual routine chores. As such they deserve little consideration:

- (i) UEC (University Enquiry Committee) – 1976-1978 (Followed the political changeover of 1975);
- (ii) Bangladesh National Education Commission (BNEC) – 1988 (formed by General Ershad who took over state power in a coup in 1982).

### **4.3.5 National Education Policy (NEP) - 2000**

In order to formulate a National Education Policy (NEP) in keeping with the recommendations of BEC - 1974 that remained stalled due to the political developments post-1975, the new government that was voted to power in 1996 formed on January 14, 1997 a Commission led by Prof Shamsul Haque. The government formed another Committee in 1998 to review the Commission's recommendations as well as to prepare a draft education policy for the country. On the basis of the second committee's review and findings the National Education Policy – 2000 (NEP-2000) was formulated following its acceptance by the Parliament. Some of the salient features of the Commission's recommendations summarized in Bangladesh Education Sector Review (Johanson, 2000, pp. 103-4) are as follows:

As usual, the Commission finds higher education far short of meeting the needs of the times and recommends exploring new knowledge and building up skilled human resources. It considers *madrasa* education stream out of touch with reality and recommends raising its standard to the level of general education. The quality of general education is far behind other developing countries, let alone the world standard.

As to the development of a research culture, emphasis should be given to “original and basic research according to the practical needs of the country; at the same time necessary facilities for research should be provided in degree colleges. Curricula and syllabi should be modern and of international standard”.

As to the efficacy of the Commission and the National Education Policy with regard to development of higher education, Johanson (2000, pp.72-73) comments that “they do not constitute a comprehensive higher education policy, nor are they perspective plans that are financially feasible for the long term.” Also, it thinks the college sector and its quality and performance do not get enough attention from the Commission.

A seminar, *Education in Bangladesh: Commitments and Challenges*, organized in 2001 by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) points out some of its glaring weaknesses. In one of its deliberations Professor Muzaffar Ahmed (seminar participants Prof Kazi Saleh Ahmad and Prof Siddiqur Rahman express similar views) points out that the National Education Policy-2000 lacks a vision and a “forward looking perspective” (CPD 2001, p. 8). The same participant further says “education is not simply the pursuit of knowledge but that it is also meant to be productive, creative, and re-creative, and these are elements that need to be reflected in the policy” (ibid), and the policy in question has failed to articulate them. Because of such a lack of vision, according to Ahmad, this policy is ‘archaic’ at best.

#### **4.3.6 National Education Commission (NEC) – 2003**

In 2001 the newly elected government formed another commission – National Education Commission (NEC) – in 2003 led by Prof Maniruzzaman Miah, a former VC of Dhaka University. The Commission submitted its Report on March 31, 2004. It worked on the basis of 32 basic principles, and some of them are mentioned below because of their relevance to this thesis:

- The main objective of education is to turn the whole population into human resources within the shortest possible time.
- The tendency to set up mono-disciplinary universities (such as Agricultural, Engineering, Medical Universities) is incompatible with the holistic idea of higher education and this needs to be discouraged.
- Research must be encouraged: Each public university needs to develop a Centre of Excellence in selected fields for the purpose of world-class research and relevant infrastructural facilities require to be created and existing facilities be expanded.
- Continuing Education needs to be introduced using modern technology to educate the whole nation and make it science and technology savvy. (NEC 2003, pp. iii & iv; my translation).

As to the overall quality of higher education in Bangladesh, the Commission is of the view that it has deteriorated very sharply in recent years. There is a lack of language policy and the country still confronts a dilemma on the language issue – should the medium of instruction be English or the mother tongue? While immediately after independence Bengali was introduced in the higher education institutions, shortage of books in the language was a major hurdle which still persists. As the Commission identifies, students at the universities are proficient neither in English nor in Bengali, and the indecision about a language policy has brought the higher education sector to the verge of a disaster. The Commission recommends that a National Language Policy should be formulated in order to overcome the current confusion surrounding the issue of language at higher education level.

While graduate unemployment is acute, there is a lack of conscious as well as concerted efforts on the part of the government to create job openings for graduates, the responsibilities of which lie mainly with the government. The Commission urges the government to take appropriate measures in this regard including updating of syllabus and curriculum every three years. The Commission recognizes the importance of the country's college sector and points to the problems it is plagued with.

However, experts are highly critical about the overall strength of the Commission. As Hye (2004, np) writes, the reports and recommendations of BEC 2003 do not conceive anything remarkable that may contribute to “develop[ing] skilled manpower and promot[ing] knowledge.” Besides, it lacks any ‘vision’ and has no “philosophy that is farsighted.” Kabir (2004) highlights the existing tensions – religious and ideological – afflicting the country's education system, and puts emphasis on the formulation of a long-term education policy suited to the need of the country and its desired developmental need. While the country is in need of a forward-looking secular, scientific and age-oriented education system, the religious-right politicians are trying to reverse the trend by blocking the way for such a transition. Such polarization on political and religious lines stands in the way of formulating a pragmatic education policy for the country. This journalist detects symptoms of religious indoctrination in the education objectives enshrined in the education policy. Such indoctrination based on an irrational belief system runs counter to democratic values which the liberal section of the society believes in and amid such contradictory ideologies a pragmatic and age-appropriate education policy, based on

rational thinking, cannot take root. This creates confusion as “reasoning and blind belief just cannot go together” (Kabir 2004, np).

The overall lack of policy direction in the higher education sector is obvious from what is presented above. The untimely demise of the BEC 1974 and the subsequent regimes’ failure to articulate a well-defined policy direction, despite a number of commissions instituted mainly for political and ideological reasons, have failed to bring about any fundamental and qualitative change in the area. The recommendations made in those commissions, including the ones made by the BEC 1974, largely remain unimplemented, or whatever is implemented in part mainly remains tokenistic.

In the context of the existing policy uncertainty, Johanson (2000) prescribes some measures in order to develop a long term strategic framework. He is of the view that the higher education sector needs a visionary plan in view of the existing policy recommendations already in place as well as of the “developments in the global economy and technology. It should be formulated by incorporating such imperatives as making the system to “increased economic competitiveness;” making higher education flexible and responsive to the “changing economic patterns;” adjusting enrolment composition to “emerging economic and occupational demands;” attaining “a productive yet affordable research capacity” aimed at the “solution of Bangladeshi problems” (Johanson 2000, p. 73).

Tailpiece: The present Bangladesh government that was voted to power in a widely accepted democratic election in 2008 has formed another education commission led by the National Professor Kabir Chowdhury to frame an education policy document based on the recommendations of BEC 1974. The new commission has already circulated its draft recommendations on the Education Ministry’s website for public opinion. As this commission is yet to finalise its recommendations, it has remained out of the purview of this thesis.

### 4.3.7 Commentary

On closer scrutiny of the above education commissions the following important aspects that are relevant to this thesis become apparent:

The BEC 1974, although it cannot shun completely a religious undertone, advocates a secular education for the overall skills and intellectual development of the masses. Secular education is a boon for building an educated and skilled workforce, and instead of indoctrinating, it helps the populace become imbued with collective or social conscience, rational thinking, free-thinking, logical thinking, progressive as well as forward-looking social and world views. By its very nature and attributes a humanities education, rooted in history, philosophy and literature, can promote secular life ideals or philosophy. Secularization of education and the humanities have the potential to complement each other. If the higher education models of the developed West as well as if the policy failure of the country's faith-based past educational dispensation is taken into consideration, the secular model, pitted against any faith-based one, deserves preferential treatment.

The BEC 1974 and the NEC 2003 justifiably oppose the segregation of science and technology education from humanities education. In view of the current intellectual insularity being practiced in Bangladesh, the argument that self-contained universities having teaching and research facilities in all branches of higher education are conducive to holistic intellectual development deserves serious consideration. If such an insularity can be corrected, it will be of benefits in two ways – the humanities will experience a disciplinary surge and the non-humanities disciplines will become enriched having breathed in the air of intellectuality nurtured through humanities disciplines such as literature and philosophy. Notably, these Commissions' recommendations in this regard go hand in hand with what educational theorists such as Flexner, Gasset, and Jaspers believe in.

The BEC 1974 points out a glaring weakness of the higher education sector; and it is its tendency to rote learning and to be purely fact-based that precludes free-thinking, creativity, entrepreneurship, analytical skills and ability, scientific curiosity and inventiveness, independent research, and ability to search for objective truth. As a matter of policy priority, these drawbacks need to be corrected in order for the system to be effective.

In the Bangladesh higher education system, the Pass Bachelor stream absorbs a large chunk of students, a staggering figure of 627891 students as per 2005 statistics (Source: BANBEIS). The analysts of the above commissions agree on the fact that this sector does not get enough policy attention and consideration. Notably, the stream's sheer number as well as its student population that comes to the system through open admission policy, the students' lower socio-economic background that calls for special policy attention and arrangements should receive differential as well as time-appropriate treatment from policy point of view. However, surprisingly, almost all policy recommendations seem to have neglected the Pass stream as an intellectual or educational underclass. This type of gross policy apartheid requires conscientious redress for a healthy and egalitarian higher education system.

The recommendations of BEC 1974 identify some basic objectives Bangladesh higher education needs to achieve. Objectives such as ensuring an egalitarian access to higher education, enhancing people's creativity, freeing them from social orthodoxy and superstition and imbuing them with progressive scientific mentality can only be achieved through a well-planned and well-implemented humanities education.

The NEC 2004 appropriately articulates the roles of Bengali and English in the country's higher education. Also, it aptly identifies the poor quality of education attributable to language deficiency. In this respect, the humanities can play a vital role in equipping students with desired language skills. It also makes recommendations to ascertain the role of English and Bengali in the higher education system.

The NEC's stress on expanding continuing education, whose opportunity is currently highly restricted, is justifiable. Through continuing education the humanities disciplines can be made more employable and more relevant to employment needs. Also, all the commissions have identified the absence of research from Bangladesh universities as a serious lacuna that deserves immediate policy attention. Equally important are the recommendations to gear the system to solving local problems.

As it appears from the critical treatment of the commissions' recommendations, Bangladesh, in view of its socio-economic realities, needs a people-oriented, not restrictive and elitist, higher education system that ensures access of maximum number of higher secondary graduates. Although such a populist view of higher education contradicts any

qualitative changes to the system, any policy decision overlooking popular demand may backfire and act as a political boomerang. A pragmatic adjustment between popular demand and quality assurance may be the solution, and a possible solution lies in making the system more problem-solution oriented, practical, job-oriented that requires more aptitude or attitude than superior talent. As well as popular expectation and aspiration from the system can be met by paying greater attention to the college sector in general and the Pass system in particular that demands of the students less intellectual and disciplinary rigours and fewer infrastructural facilities.

## **4.4 Humanities education in Bangladesh – doctrinal and contextual consideration**

While Bangladesh higher education can derive a lot of benefits from the developments that are eventuating around the world, it cannot blindly imitate innovations having foreign origin and mintage. There needs to be a congenial interaction between its doctrinal roots in its own situation and the innovations that have come about in foreign countries in different socio-political, economic and, cultural contexts. In order to better understand the doctrinal basis of higher education in Bangladesh in its own setting, we need to explore how its own thinkers, philosophers, educational theorists, and intellectuals have understood as well as analysed it in its local perspectives.

### **4.4.1 Rabindranath Tagore**

In his essay *What should a University Look Like?* (in Bagchi & Islam eds 2006, pp. 54-65), Rabindranath Tagore examines the issue of higher education from his philosophical as well creative points of view. Knowledge should be acquired in its holistic whole in order to build a universal conduit; the university should endeavour to spread the light of knowledge, message of universal brotherhood as well as nurture in the students an attachment to knowledge and learning. The university should be a meeting place of both modernity and tradition. Knowledge procured in the world over the ages blends with the contemporary store house of knowledge, and such knowledge is utilized to solve the complexities of life as well as to develop creativity and intellectuality through the promotion of arts and literature.

Alongside his belief that higher education should aim at both intellectual as well as economic advancement – learning for its own sake and material development, Tagore upholds that the university requires to be rooted in the country's own intellectual soil and climate. It needs to be born and moulded out of its own intellectual as well as mundane necessities. As an intellectual centre it should be the outcome of unified visions energized by the power of country's collective genius and creativity. It should attain its institutional shape from the spontaneous manifestation of the host country's intellectual cravings created innately within her own geographical ambience as well as out of her perennial life-force.

Tagore appreciates the contemporary European universities that had their roots in the countries of their origin and reflected the aspirations of the countries they were based in as well as supported by. Also, they were expected to propagate disciplinary knowledge that had its roots in the culture and traditions of the countries concerned. These universities shaped themselves to include courses in their curriculum that were of immediate importance to society and its varied needs. He, however, found the contemporary Indian universities wanting in such a holy alliance between the knowledge needs and the indigenous sources of knowledge. While knowledge needs to change to adapt to the evolving circumstances, in case of India even European knowledge, having come in touch with age-old local knowledge, seemed to have stagnated. What India got from Europe appeared to have failed to adjust to the local needs and problems. As such, knowledge imparted in Indian universities remained cut off from indigenous life. He mentions, lamentably (Tagore, p. 62; my translation): “Here we acquire alien knowledge like any immovable objects; we fail to realize as well as appreciate them through our heart and intellect. We simply resort to rote learning and consequently our knowledge is fragmented or piecemeal. Our knowledge is mainly book-based and we lack the ability to be innovative and inventive.” Such acquisition of knowledge has hardly anything to do with any mental and emotional development. Universities' academic programs, delivered by duly qualified teachers imbued with the noblest mission of imparting holistic education that prepares students for life as well as intellectual rigours, should devote themselves to such an education as can develop creativity and help make human civilization a dynamic process. Purely exam-based education can rarely contribute to such a process, and Tagore was highly critical of the contemporary Indian higher education system for its failure to gear to that end.

Building a country's higher education edifice on foreign models is not unrealistic as long as it can be re-moulded on the basis of country's local needs as well as the salutary aspects of a foreign system are applied to local exigencies. Japan, as Tagore observes, was a test case, and the very needs of an appropriate higher education system for its overall economic and intellectual development arose from its local practicalities. Then they looked for a system that might be used to excel their own system having taken the ground realities into consideration. As a system it assumed a national dimension although it borrowed a lot from other European, especially German, systems at its nascent stage. At the same time, it was geared to meet national needs.

#### **4.4.2 Promoth Chowdhury**

To Promoth Chowdhury (*Our Education System and Life Problems* in Bagchi & Islam eds 2006, pp. 66-80), education is useful for existential needs and intellectual empowerment. In his essay, Chowdhury underscores the real worth of higher education in developing brain power or general intelligence which helps man take charge of his destiny. It should aim at bringing about a harmony between knowledge for self-development, knowledge for empowerment and material needs to face the realities of life. In Bengal's context educated people have failed to apply their intellect as well as mind's prowess to their existential necessities, and it is evident in their socio-economic backwardness. While they are economically powerless, socially they are constrained by incurable orthodoxy and age-old superstition. They are not mentally, emotionally and intellectually empowered, and hence not liberated economically and intellectually. As he puts it, "In such a case knowledge accrued through higher education becomes a burden; the ideas and ideals accumulated remain as useless as political rhetoric" (ibid, p. 77; my translation).

As to the impact of existing social orthodoxy on higher education in Bengal, Chowdhury says that regressive social ideals prevent students from getting real education that can instil in them the power of freethinking as well as empowering them to lead a self-reliant life by taking charge of their own destiny. There seems to exist in the populace a contradiction between scientificity of ideas and their deep-rooted tradition and orthodox beliefs. As he contends, "The reason for this contradiction is not that difficult to discern. The education system, primarily of foreign origin and innovation, cannot strike a happy alliance with our society that is overly nationalistic, fanatic and primitive. These opposing trends are in constant strife to elbow out each other: one has to be displaced at the expense of the other,

and this pull and push between tradition and progress has foiled any real attempt for reform” (Promoth Chowdhury in Bagchi & Islam eds 2006, p. 76; my translation)

### **4.4.3 Nalinikanta Gupta**

Nalinikanta Gupta (*Our Education* in Bagchi & Islam eds 2006, pp. 93-102) seems to posit the whole gamut of higher education in Bengal from an ethnic or regional perspective that pragmatically touches on the emotional, cultural, intellectual, psychic, and attitudinal make-up or temperament of the Bengalis as a people. While the education system itself is, to a greater extent, to blame, other concomitant factors that influence them as human beings are also responsible for their intellectual and educational backwardness.

Gupta delves deep into the Bengali psyche and its interrelation with and influence upon the region’s higher education system which is nothing “more than some abstruse mantras that entail memorizing set verses and then forgetting them in a matter of days” (Gupta, p. 101; my translation). Literary-minded and too idealistic by nature, Bengalis are more given to over-philosophizing or over-sentimentalizing issues as well as expressiveness or eloquence through oratory and writing. As Gupta (p. 98) argues, “Such verbalism leads to unreality,” and creates an aversion to gainful vocations: they have an escapist tendency that propels them to look down upon their material existence and to look heavenwards at the expense of material wellbeing; they have a propensity to create an ideal world by means of imagination and to remain immersed in this ideal world. If an actual sense of the reality can be infused in them, even an education system based on English may be meaningful. Also, they will have to be taught how to understand mundane worldliness through work ethic; they will have to discard verbalism and embrace ‘kinesthetic’ habit.

Education should be linked to life and reality; it is real education that uses both pen and tool; that helps solve problems; it is real education that connects creativity and knowledge earned through questioning and inquisitiveness to the needs of life. Making education reality-oriented, according to Gupta, involves creating “a real-life continuum where life, reality and different work-related institutions are interconnected. We see in the US and British educational systems an endeavour to keep students involved in life’s flowing tide; to keep education connected to the outer world having kept it nourished, fresh as well as renewed in keeping with the flow of time” (Gupta, p.101; my translation).

#### **4.4.4 Sirajul Islam Chowdhury**

In his essay entitled *The University and Its Responsibilities* (in Shahed H A ed 2002, pp. 615-626), Professor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury attempts to chart a way as to how the universities in Bangladesh can accomplish their social role in order to build a progressive and prosperous society. Chowdhury (2002) extols the collective social role of the universities in Bangladesh and considers these seats of higher learning fortress against all regressive socio-economic and politico-religious forces, and they have acted at different critical moments of the nation's history as its overriding conscience.

Chowdhury (2002) blames the current higher education system, a legacy of the colonial past, for creating a class of sham local aristocracy that is “seemingly refined and educated, but at heart devoid of any higher ideals. People belonging to this class lack self-confidence and self-power; they have greed for material gain or comfort. They are self conscious but devoid of self-respectability” (Chowdhury 2002: pp. 619-620; my translation). He advocates an education system that will fulfil the real expectations of making full and perfect individuals who are able to reason and ask questions; who are imbued with love and humanity. Such individuals will condemn poverty and exploitation and endeavour to build an undefiled or uncontaminated society.

An exponent of egalitarianism in class structure as well as distribution of educational privileges and opportunity, Chowdhury (2002) envisions a newer society of educated people of the greatest number. He wants the doors of the universities to remain open to all who are intellectually capable irrespective of their socio-economic status so that class stratification becomes abolished. The current elitist system that the British designed by motive to perpetuate class structure produces graduates who would further help augment the class system. Once they come out of the system, they remain aloof from the masses. This needs to be changed by allowing children from the underprivileged section of the society to get higher education on scholarships, subvention and financial incentives.

Chowdhury (2002) wants to make higher education in the country more production oriented for which people need unmitigated energy, enterprising mentality and unalloyed inspiration devoid of any motive for self-aggrandizement. Collective efforts and inspiration motivated by forward-looking vision as well as love of mankind can infuse lasting energy among the people. As he (Chowdhury 2002, p. 621, my translation)

enunciates, “Good managerial skills coupled with active and energized mentality are of utmost necessity to manage production processes. ... Bangladesh needs such educated people as can combine active intellect, concern and care to further social transformation.”

Ninety percent Bangladeshis are virtually handicapped in intellectual terms and considered powerless socially and economically. Surprisingly, the upper section of the society does not have any moral qualms about this social and intellectual inequality, and people seem to have tolerated this situation for hundreds of years without having been swayed or perturbed. The education they have been receiving does not instil any conscience in them; the universities in Bangladesh have a greater responsibility in this aspect, and they have to perform the difficult task of bringing to an end this injustice through a humane education system. As well as, Bangladesh society at large is captive to various forms of antiquated values, traditions and superstitions, and the universities can ameliorate such a deplorable situation by nurturing as well as creating an environment for freethinking. Proper education inculcating free spirits can facilitate emancipation from such social vices.

Lamentably, the universities in Bangladesh have failed to assume the role of social critics as various regimes, apprehensive of popular discontent, have not allowed these institutions to flourish as independent entities. They need intellectual freedom to create and transmit knowledge; to interpret new knowledge to establish its scientificity as well as to criticize the society outside to prevent it from degenerating into ideological anarchy or authoritarianism. Such freedom helps generate new ideas to create new mentality that in turn may help build a newer society free from antiquated belief and superstition. A university’s primary responsibility should target social transformation through new ideas to replace the old and worn ones as well as by creating a new mentality. In case of Bangladesh, considering its prevailing moral *fin de siècle*, the responsibilities of its universities towards this end are of paramount importance.

#### **4.4.5 Khan Sarwar Morshed**

In the essay *Philosophy of Education: Its Social Objectives* (in Shahed H A ed 2002, pp. 217-223), Professor Khan Sarwar Morshed points to a doctrinal innovation that might suit the reality of Bangladesh higher education. Drawing on the higher education theories enunciated by Plato, Newman, Tagore and Jaspers, Morshed (2002) attempts to formulate a theory of higher education which he calls ‘libertarianism’. To Plato and Newman,

knowledge is a means of emancipation, and such emancipation can be achieved through the wholeness of knowledge as well as by attaining truth through rational questioning. It helps refine and reform as well as free the mind which is otherwise shackled. Morshed (2002), following their theorization of knowledge and higher education, expounds that higher education, by its very nature, leads man to enlightenment from darkness; it empowers as well as emancipates man through the prowess of intellect. At the same time, he supports Jaspers' middle ground – education should not be too theoretical or too practical oriented. He thinks knowledge should focus more on acquiring critical skills aimed at attaining truth; education, higher education in particular, is a process of self-transformation that helps mould an individual by inculcating in him/her an ability for self-criticism – criticism as an essential condition for existential needs. Like Jaspers and Tagore, he believes in the transformative power of education, and through an intermingling of both practical and analytical skills the individuals and through them the whole society undergo intellectual and material improvement.

It is evident that Morshed (2002) is supporting the liberal tradition expounded by Newman; and according to him, the Newmanian tradition of higher education is effective in inculcating individual freedom or autonomy which in turn empowers human beings to rule over his own fate. Such an attribute is no less powerful and can be relevant to any developing society. In the context of Bangladesh, the biggest challenge is to juxtapose the liberal philosophy of higher education with utilitarianism. As Morshed puts it, “Such a juxtaposition involves a number of responsibilities: Logical and close relationship among all stages of education needs to be established ... university curriculum needs to be interdisciplinary; fields of specialization should be made optional... .” (Morshed 2002, pp. 222-223; my translation).

Morshed (2002) opposes the universities and other institutions of higher learning being considered mainly the bastion of useful knowledge at the expense of their liberal orientation. Such a disproportionate importance on their practical orientation will preclude building a humane society. Also, universities, by directing their energies solely towards society's practical needs, may neglect idealism which is no less important. In the case of the latter, education will lose its critical edge needed to build a healthy society and encourage students to embrace narrow practical ends having forgotten their exalted ideals. In the case of Bangladesh, such a tendency has bred a society that is more prone to violence and destructiveness.

## 4.4.6 Commentary

A country's higher education system requires to be rooted in its own socio-economic needs and exigencies; it should derive life force or productive stimulus from its own intellectual soil. Any foreign borrowings should not be forcibly transplanted or grafted on its structure; a happy communion, brought about through mutual and healthy interaction, needs to work to the maximum benefit of its own intellectual and socio-economic necessities. The researchers, intellectuals and thinkers whose views have been articulated in this chapter are highly revered in Bangladesh and West Bengal for their intellectual credentials, conscience and objective progressive outlook. Their views on higher education may give us enough directions to reshape it through a healthy and congenial interaction between its indigenous roots and the salutary aspects of its foreign influences. A careful scrutiny brings to the fore a pattern of thoughts and ideas that can help remould Bangladesh's higher education, especially the humanities education.

The above personalities seem to be able to fathom the very nature of higher education and its effectiveness in the context of Bengal. The fact that knowledge should be holistic and bear a universal dimension is well recognized, and in Bengal's context it needs to be both modern and tradition oriented. The Bengali psyche moulded more on tradition than on modernity requires an adjustment to the latter through an education system that emphasizes age-old Bengali fascination for arts, literature and above all their innate creativity influenced by mystical nature and its varied attributes. The practical aspects of life that mainly remain ignored due to over-sentimentalisation should be brought to a happy coexistence alongside the Bengali propensity to be overly imaginative and unworldly. When, through a well-defined higher education system, the characteristically Bengali psyche gets comingled with western materialism and abstract philosophical knowledge, higher education in Bengal can accomplish its desired goal.

These scholars recognize the utility of higher education in terms of its intellectual nourishment as well as material prosperity. Life, even when looked through the prism of unreality or through the kaleidoscope of ideality, cannot override the needs for survival that calls for tangible life-skills – skills that can help solve a myriad of problems life and reality are beset with. They realize this very hard fact and advocate an education system that is designed to meet life's multi-faceted needs; they propagate the necessity for gaining knowledge for material prosperity, self-empowerment and for self-development. They

blame socio-religious orthodoxy and superstition for the Bengalis' failure to strike a happy balance between their intellectual needs and aspirations and material requirements. Higher education needs to work towards enlightening them through the inculcation of secular and progressive beliefs and ideals.

As to the educational adjustment of indigenous needs to the forces that are of foreign origin or mintage, the higher education system of a country should primarily and essentially be based on its characteristically own intellectual and socio-economic needs; it should reflect its own cultural, material and intellectual cravings and inspirations. Based on its own needs for innovation and realignment, it can look for adjustable models that suit its societal, economic, cultural and intellectual requirement. When foreign models are adapted to local needs, they should lose their foreignness and become indigenized. As well as those alien models need to be looked at critically, imaginatively and with the nuanced touch of creativity, innovation and inventiveness. Ideas adopted without discrimination are tantamount to nothing but blind imitation. In the case of Bangladesh, foreign influences have resulted in blind imitation without any adjustment to local exigencies, and due to a lack of healthy comingling such outside forces look like mere borrowings or useless outgrowth. There seems to be no creative realignment or reconfiguration, nor does it seem that the system has assumed a national character or dimension. Instead of using the foreign attributes to improve the local system, the latter has either become subservient to the former or it has assumed a dimension that is neither foreign or local resulting in an unhealthy tussle between tradition tempered with fanaticism as well as excessive nationalism and modernity.

As revealed, a faulty higher education system that has failed to bring about a healthy juxtaposition between tradition and modernity, between liberal ideals of higher education and the pressure for utilitarianism is responsible for a violence-prone society which currently Bangladesh is. The above scholars are in favour of building a humane and tolerant society through a healthy juxtaposition of reality with ideality, idealism with utilitarianism, vocationalism in education with intellectualism or liberalism. In this respect, higher education has a great social responsibility. Only a higher education system that prioritizes its social objectives can help bring about social reformation and change in this backward and poverty-stricken country through a progressive education system that aims at equipping students with collective social and intellectual conscience, love of humanity, ability to reason.

A class-stratified society like Bangladesh whose upper section of the population lacks compunction and wallows in luxury at the cost of common people's misery requires an egalitarian education system. To break the bastion of social injustice, self-aggrandizement and deprivation in the name of elitism, Bangladesh needs an egalitarian higher education with wider access of the disadvantaged to the system. Also, the higher education institutions are required to act as social critics and rise to a moral high ground to save the populace from the tyranny of social orthodoxy and superstition by introducing an age appropriate and time-befitting humanistic education system based on the ideals of freethinking, scientificity of educational dispensation and rational thinking.

Thus it is seen that this Section focuses on a number of vital issues pertinent to the relevance of higher education in Bangladesh context. Bangladesh needs a higher education system that needs to fulfil expectations and necessities arising from its own intellectual soil. While borrowings from other countries that have an improved higher education system in place have their beneficial effects, such borrowings should not be arbitrary or out of context. Innovations and borrowings in any form should be commensurate with local exigencies.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

Speaking historically, higher education in Bangladesh has passed through different stages since the time of antiquity that were at times turbulent and at other times very promising. Its current shape and status are not something that was foisted on it by mere chance or shaped through a flow of events that were unrelated without any rational or logical underpinning. Needless to say, history is not the sum total of a set of blind happenings, nor is it a conglomerate of a chain of events that eventuate without any conscious participation of human beings as conscious agents. It is pertinent to note that the current dilapidated state of higher education in Bangladesh is due to different players' unrealistic and unpragmatic actions motivated more by irrational beliefs and ideologies than by pragmatic needs of the country and its people. As different education reports demonstrate, the country's education policy still seems to be plagued as well as vitiated by illogical politico-religious doctrines and belief systems. In this age of global interconnectedness it is simply suicidal to remain oblivious to what is going on in the outside world and how the pragmatically-driven nations of the world are shaping their education systems to the

pragmatic needs of their people by accepting changes based on findings reached through appropriate empirical research. The next Chapter will explore how the landscape of scholarly research in the area of higher education and its relevance has been shaped by contemporary research findings. The next two Chapters will provide us with an important body of knowledge that we can utilize to improve the relevance of higher education in Bangladesh. Notably, these Chapters will pave the way to improving the system through pragmatic policy changes or intervention. In doing so, there should be attempts to contextualise research findings to the local reality, and in this regard, the views expressed in this Chapter by the local intelligentsia will be taken into account as well. Let us now turn to the next Chapter that will dwell upon the different attributes of the humanities that can make humanities education relevant to the existing realities.

# Chapter 5

## The Relevance of the Humanities – Existing Knowledge and Model

“Creativity is a drug I cannot live without.” - Cecil B DeMille

It is evident that historically the humanities have performed multifarious roles in response to society's varied needs, both tangible and intangible. In the current socio-economic and intellectual contexts, the humanities disciplines have gone through pedagogical and epistemological changes that call for looking at the issue of relevance in a fresh perspective. In order to demonstrate the efficacy of humanities knowledge in the changed circumstances, this Chapter gives an overview of current research and scholarship in relation to the relevance of the humanities as well as examines different humanities-related skills, models, and innovations that have been tested in academic and real-life situations.

### 5.1 Intrinsic or generic skills

Unlike skill-based courses that treat students as passive recipients of quantifiable data, the humanities that involve active learning equip graduates with general skills such as “intelligent and critical thinking, speaking, and writing” (Hart 1990, p. 65; also, Brint *et al* 2005). The humanities can equip students with other useful intrinsic skills such as clear and argumentative thinking, the ability to reason and deduce conclusions, criticising an argument as to its veracity, validity and fallacies, to be sceptical about the falsity, fallibility or otherwise of an argument, and developing own argumentative skills through organisation and analysis of the available information and resources (Curtler 2002). Also, courses in the humanities can help increase intellectual acuity, whet critical ability, and develop communication skills which in turn help handle ambiguous and complex situations (Lynton 1993). Hart (1990; also, Lynton 1993) identifies other important general functions a humanities education is capable of performing, and they are civilising or humanising function, democratising or liberalising function.

As most of the humanities courses involve writing a lot of assignments, projects, term papers, theses, dissertations, and so on, by way of creating or performing such tasks the students acquire the art of writing. In this regard, the humanities disciplines have a clear-cut superiority over those disciplines that put more emphasis on training and laboratory work. Lyon (1992, p. 137) advocates the same notion: “Through the teaching methods used in essays and seminars students develop their abilities to construct and present coherent and persuasive arguments in speech and writing.” In addition, the humanities graduates have the better chance to learn how to gather information through critical and rigorous reading that assists in selecting and assimilating relevant information, taking notes and summarising material. All these specific attributes characteristic of the humanistic disciplines award the humanities a special rationale for their existence in academe.

Also, the humanities are better poised to impart improved linguistic skills such as more than functional literacy, expert use of the language through training in grammar, spelling, and the appropriate use of words. As data gleaned from Curtler (2002) show, freshmen in the four-year public colleges and universities in the USA have serious literacy weakness; and students who need remedial courses in English range up to 55 per cent in many colleges, astoundingly the rate being 13 per cent even in many prestigious private universities. Moreover, the vocabulary power of today’s students has shrunk by 72 per cent when compared to statistics of the 1950s, and Curtler (2002) attributes these shortcomings to reading deficiency which only the humanities can correct.

Notably, a survey conducted on six humanities students at Union College, USA, produced encouraging results as to the effectiveness of the humanities in developing intrinsic skills. Five of the participants found that the study of classic works of literature, history and philosophy, both western and oriental, was useful for individual as well as human development. All of them were of the view that literature presented imaginative and exploratory uses of language and exposed them, through reading, discussing and writing, to “different ways of conceiving and expressing human experience” that in turn “requires us to integrate them into our own lives” (Sorum 1999, p. 241). One respondent mentioned quite assuredly that studying literature was a mode of training in the use or manipulations of language; it could impart persuasion skills through reading and writing about novels, philosophical treatises, and historical documents (*ibid*). Another student found that studying classics increased her data integrating skills while another reported increased critical thinking skills; and both the skills, they admitted, were useful for conducting

research.

Also, artistic pursuits of any sort can improve creativity: visual arts such as drawing, painting can improve engineering and architecture students' 'motor skills' and the ability to think and reason spatially; students doing music and art perform at schools better than other students who do not do them; playing instruments improves recognising pattern, a skill used often in mathematics; dancing can enhance abstract thinking and the ability to think 'outside the square' (Katey 2007). While such intrinsic skills are needed more than ever, research in the US context shows that such skills in students declined in the 1990 compared to American college students in 1960s and such deterioration is attributed to studying fewer courses in the humanities (Brint et al 2005).

When compared with graduates of business and engineering fields, humanities graduates make the best administrators, leaders, and middle management. A survey conducted within the American high technology corporation, AT&T, showed that graduates of the arts and liberal disciplines acquired "better interpersonal skills such as leadership, oral communication, and personality. ... 46% of arts graduates showed they had the potential for middle management positions, whereas only 31% of business and 26% of engineering graduates showed similar potential" (Hart 1990, p. 64).

According to Curtler (2002), in order for the humanities graduates to be able to utilize their skills, the first requirement is that they have to be well-educated; once they are well-educated, they will have niche areas where their demand will be felt. As well as to make intrinsic skills really worthy and usable, a clear-cut line of distinction between education and job-training needs to be demarcated permanently. Academics have to be honest in delivering their service and decide if they will give what their students want or what they need. They have to determine what their students actually need – narrow job training or emancipation. If empowering or freeing them is the main objective, it will not eventuate unless proper education is insulated from job-training. By targeting education in its true perspective, we can both educate students as well as prepare them for purposeful vocation; on the contrary, by stressing purely job-preparation, we are not giving them full education.

As Curtler (2002) further elaborates, the humanities will regain their intrinsic value if success is not looked at solely in terms of high-paying job. An educated person empowered through rounded education may be considered successful even when she does jobs beneath

her qualifications. Society needs to change its attitudes in terms of equating financial success with personal empowerment as well as the worth of a person as an individual with her status determined by sheer monetary success. It should be understood in terms of life's intellectual and spiritual devotion and growth. It should adopt Aristotle's work ethos which maintains human beings work for leisure instead of making them doomed.

## **5.2 Subject profile and curriculum innovation**

Different researchers identify both the problems and prospects the humanities currently experience in terms of curriculum reforms and innovations and put forward a number of proposals to rejuvenate those disciplines that are languishing and to emulate those that are already in good health. Predicting a brighter future for the humanities, Bassnet (2002) identifies history, history of medicine, geography, philosophy and classics to be enjoying better prospects in the changing academic environment. She finds evidence of the popularity of history as a whole in the publication of best-selling books based on historical themes or popular TV programs on History Channels. The reason behind their gaining popularity and strength is the ability to reconfigure themselves as well as enhance student competencies. Also, curricular and methodological adjustments have been made to meet students' needs and expectations.

Higher education, so far a "means of understanding and controlling an external environment", has become a medium to understand "oneself and one's social, class and ethnic situation" (Pascoe 2003, p. 11). As Pascoe argues, the humanities need to go through curriculum reshuffle by accommodating new developments that have recently eventuated in keeping with the needs of the changed scenario. Hitherto restricted to traditional fields such as philosophy, history, literature, by now the arts and humanities curriculum has expanded to include women's studies, cultural studies, Asian studies, Latin American studies among others. English departments have introduced postmodernism reshaping the study of texts and of literary criticism; in history departments, the influence of social history has helped transform interpretations of the past. Remarkably, the re-vamped curriculum, as it has heeded the pulse of the time, has won huge support and response from the new generation of students.

As part of curriculum realignment, in the 1990s, the BA program in Australia (in line with developments in the USA, the UK, and Canada) underwent significant change in terms of curriculum and student choice. The program included broader fields of the arts, social

sciences and the humanities and Pascoe (2003) categorizes them into three types – general, vocational and intermediate. The general BA degrees offer students a free or almost-free range of choice in constructing their majors; these degrees typically provide the simple post nominal BA. The vocational BA is more structured and includes courses such as multimedia while the intermediate BA shares characteristics from both the categories. Another important innovation in the BA degree offered at Australian universities is the introduction of fieldwork and work-based learning. Drawing on successes in placements and the use of real-life situations in areas such as psychology, even relatively abstract areas, history for example, now require fieldwork. Learning by doing such as excavation or digging in archaeology, role-playing in history, use of theatre for international students of English and the case method popularised by the Harvard Business School is gaining popularity in the Australian BA program.

In contrast, Weisbuch (1999) discovers in the proponents of the humanities a sense of inertia, self-pitying, insularity, defeatism; also, their fields have ceased to be interesting. Moreover, they have stopped being creative, imaginative and innovative in comparison with those in the sciences; they are “not problem solvers. An engineer takes a problem and fixes it. A humanist takes a problem and celebrates its complexity. That is fine until we ourselves are the problem” (Weisbuch 1999, np). Also, they are not enterprising enough to look for alternative sources of employment beyond the cosy frontiers of academia or beyond their existing niche areas; verily, they suffer from insularity and are more smug with teaching literature and its canons but reluctant to engage themselves with community groups. As a whole, “...too much posturing and too few ideas headed toward action contribute to a culture of edgy despair and fretful infighting” within their own pastures (ibid). Weisbuch (1999) favours reforming the humanities disciplines in order for them to remain viable in an increasingly market-oriented environment and makes the following arguments:

- Instead of being obsessed with mere ‘rhetoric’, the humanists must act on ‘fact’ or ‘data’ to find where jobs and employment opportunities are. They should not wait for opportunities to knock on their door; they should take initiatives to go out to look for them. Weisbuch deplores the excessive number of graduate programs that need to be checked through academic ‘birth control’. He opposes churning out graduates in ‘worse-than-useless’ fields without viable employability and the

obvious prescription is curtailing the number of graduates in areas that are not readily employable.

- As a cure, this researcher recommends reclaiming the curriculum through innovation, an exercise in which the sciences have definitive edge over the humanities. For practical reasons the humanities cannot compete with the sciences on equal terms with regard to empirical research and scholarship; however, this can be compensated by placing increased emphasis on teaching, and to achieve this they need to re-establish their pedagogical excellence. The humanists “need internships, carefully staged and guided development of pedagogical abilities, even degrees that combine a humanities discipline with necessary knowledge in, say, new technology or journalism” (Weisbuch 1999, np). As well as they need to accept ‘contradiction’, and learning for its own sake should also make way for knowledge and expertise to meet the ready challenges posed by the complexities of modern life. Private scholarship without utility needs to assume a public dimension, and this can be done through popularizing the humanities to non-humanists as well as being eloquent about the efficacy of these disciplines. Graduate programs need redesigning through an incorporation of expertise from surrounding disciplines, keeping, as far as possible, intact disciplinary integrity and the scholarly aspects of programs.

Brown *et al* (2006) are in favour of innovating, redefining and reconfiguring humanities knowledge according to the emerging epistemological trends so that it can remain relevant to the changed technological, intellectual, and cultural ambience. They believe that the humanities, being at the ‘core’ of higher education, engage with as many aspects of knowledge production as possible, and they propose to make them the focal point of all intellectual activities or mission of the university and bring the humanities disciplines to the fore as a foundation or a core. This implies that the humanities provide basic instruction upon which other learning depends. In this sense, the humanists can contribute to the mission of the university through incorporating in curriculum such aspects as using the humanities to define and identify ‘questions of value’ and devising ways to deal with them; enhancing and promoting the significance of human creativity that contributes to aesthetic and artistic pleasure.

Birnbaum (1998) justifiably blames such self-inflicted causes as different arcane, esoteric and jargon-ridden methods of teaching or presenting literature and allied disciplines for their loss of popularity and appeal. He faults the literary critics, jocularly called ‘lit-crits’, as well as teachers given to pedantry for wreaking havoc on the genial pleasure of literature by presenting it to innocuous readers in such a way as to destroy interest in them. These pedantic teachers, armed with an array of abstruse literary theories, have deviated from the old ways of teaching literature “with a love and enthusiasm that were contagious and easily transferred to their students,” and such a practice has ostensibly “paralyzed the judgment of readers and killed the appreciation of literature” (Birnbaum 1998, p. 178). Teachers should be able to infuse in their students genuine love and interest when they teach literature; literary critics need to be lucid and present literature with ‘grace’, and their prime devotion should be to literature as literature. These so-called ‘lit-crits’ have supplanted the literary masters with critics, instead. He regrets how readers are being caught off-guard in “attacks of ‘knowingness’ ... that prevents shudders of awe and makes one immune to enthusiasm” (ibid, p. 180). In consideration of what is said here, Birnbaum’s prognosis, idealistic though, is that in order for the humanities to survive, the humanists have no other way but to revert to their archetypal goal “to ‘humanize’ ... to promote love of wisdom ...” (ibid, 181). They should reaffirm the spiritual, transcendent, humanistic values of literature whose works are not to be judged by contemporary relevance, but by the standards which have made them endure for centuries.

In order to revive the humanities, the humanists need also to take note of the demographic changes that are happening in terms of their students’ different socio-economic backgrounds and age-groups. They must understand who their students are and what interests them and produce courses that attract different segments of the student body. Some courses, for example leadership training, may be of special interest to humanities students, and this course may particularly attract older students who are interested in taking leadership role or who are already on jobs at midlevel management posts. As (Chodorow 1997, np) puts it, the “humanities as education for leadership” have not been given due attention; and “we should ... develop programs that give an education for that purpose.”

### **5.3 Synthesis, synchrony, interdisciplinarity and curriculum innovation**

In the current complex world, problems are multifarious and multi-pronged and cannot be solved solely through technical and quantitative knowledge and expertise. Nor can they be solved through one traditionally defined profession working alone. Their solutions depend on the collective and collaborative insights of different disciplines that transcend fixed boundaries. In such a diffuse situation, interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary perspectives with humanities as participating disciplines can play a crucial role. Virtually, at a time when knowledge is fragmented and compartmentalised, students are required to possess a range of skills as well as breadth of knowledge. Subjects that are considered ‘limited’ or more narrowly defined cannot thrive. Courses that have been proved successful and popular should be offered or clustered together so that students can enhance their employment prospects. In this context, Bassnet (2002; also, Hardy 1990; Demers 2002; Chodorow 1997; Engell & Dangerfield 1998) corroborates the needs for coupling of the humanities with science, business, medicine. By studying the humanities in interdisciplinary perspectives, students can establish connections between different disciplines and glean new perspectives and ideas in the process. Obviously, because of their polymathic attributes and having no fixed institutional or intellectual parameters, the humanities have an overarching influence on multidisciplinary approach to learning.

In the same spirit, Donaldson (1990, pp. 26-27; also, Chodorow 1990) recommends a taxonomical merger between the humanities and the social sciences in order for the former to enhance their relevance in the contemporary situations by capitalizing on the theoretical as well as methodological similarity permeating each other’s territory. Such methodological and theoretical commonalities are evident from how historians, anthropologists, sociologists, literary critics, lawyers, and philosophers are at present working on identical problems with the same methodological approaches. To cite an example, at Duke University, the English Department and the School of Law are working together and organizing advanced seminars on literary and legal hermeneutics. Such collaborative efforts can unite humanists, social scientists, and lawyers and lead to the ‘usable’ humanities which may be considered a life-endowing initiative.

As further illustration of such taxonomical merger, Donaldson (1990) cites how in the 1980s the University of Edinburgh took a multidisciplinary approach to the humanities and worked in tandem with other allied as well as unrelated fields. The University’s Institute of

Advanced Study in the Humanity, instead of simply replicating the existing activities of the Faculty of Arts, chose the Scottish Enlightenment as a theme of the Faculty in consideration of the interest various institutions of the city took in it. It approached the theme not only from the perspectives of philosophy, religion, art, rhetoric, and so forth, but also from the view points of medicine, agriculture, geology, engineering, law, mathematics, chemistry, and natural history. Initially a risky enterprise, it turned out to be highly successful for the very reason that a purely historical phenomenon was treated creatively with a multidisciplinary approach and interest. Again, in the 1970s the American National Endowment for the Humanities, in line with Congressional prescription, reinterpreted the taxonomical boundary of the humanities and included in their fold “humanitarian, humane, or human interests, which a study of the humanities was thought to promote” (Donaldson 1990, pp. 23-24). This is how, despite criticism of using academic disciplines as a civic religion, the humanities underwent realignment or reorientation to serve humanitarian or humane interests – culture was taken to ghettos, hospitals, schools and neighbourhood centres so that it could improve rural life; make teenagers less destructive and lower the crime rate. As well as it was meant to benefit senior citizens by elevating hobbies, relaxations, entertainment and discussions (ibid, p. 24).

Frodeman *et al* (2003) point out how, beyond the ethical concerns that stem from the inappropriate use of technology, the works of literature are being used in the teaching of biomedical ethics; how future physicians are being taught how to be sensitive as well as appreciative about the human experiences of sickness and sufferings. In the field of environmental philosophy, ethical analysis is being complemented by knowledge of literature, poetry, history, art, and theology, and “these innovations only scratch the surface of what the humanities can bring to the interface of science, technology, and society” (Frodeman *et al* 2003, p. 32). Experts in the field of science and technology foresee much greater engagement with the humanities, and this is evident from what George Bugliarello, chancellor of Polytechnic University in New York, argues: “The crucial questions for our culture are, what is it, indeed, to be human, and how can we maintain and enhance our humanity as we develop ever more revolutionary scientific advances?” (cited in Frodeman *et al* 2003, p. 32). Through a “vision of an interdisciplinary humanities deeply involved with public life and especially with questions associated with science and technology” (Frodeman *et al* 2003, p. 32), the humanities can be a partner with the sciences in furthering public good.

Also, transformations in the disciplinary boundaries, multi-directional in character, have broken down traditional areas resulting in such “crosscutting interdisciplinary areas as ethnic studies, gender studies, cultural studies, and new kinds of area studies or global studies; critical theory has broadened the base of reading into philosophy, sociology, ethnography, anthropology, and political and social theory” (Davidson & Goldberg 2004, p. B7). Several areas of social science, pejoratively called soft science, have taken up literary theory, techniques and methods that are practiced in “narrative and subjective, memoiristic writing” (ibid). New areas such as “science studies, critical legal theory, and science-and-information studies” nowadays belong to humanistic fields. Such transformations that have occurred in cross-disciplinary lines have made the “humanities ... a many-splendored thing” (ibid).

There is a need for inculcating in the students of science, technology and medicine knowledge of the humanities in order to effect a synthesis between academic (thinking which the humanities deal with) and operational (doing, pertaining to science and technology) competencies. Such a combination of science and arts courses, as Schneider (2004; also, Webb 2008) thinks, can help achieve a balance in the acquisition of knowledge; as well as, as recent research finds it, such cross-disciplinary curriculum cooperation has beneficial effects that include exposing engineering and technological students to alternative scholarly communication, knowledge and understandings; enhancing their creativity; breaking down disciplinary insularity; increasing an understanding of reflexivity or the impact of technology on society; developing moral and civic responsibilities that help contribute to meaningful social role.

Goodlad (2000) cites different initiatives British universities undertook in the 1960s and 1970s to contextualize scientists and engineers’ knowledge through what is often loosely called liberal studies. He researches the humanities program at the Imperial College of Science, Technology & Medicine (ICSTM) in order to show how humanities and science-technology related courses are being conducted in conjunction with each other at this world-class institution. The program’s main objective is to remedy the deleterious effects of an overspecialized or narrow education that simply degenerates into mere accumulation of facts and techniques. As well as it aims at acquainting students with “some of the central moral, political and social issues of contemporary society, together with familiarity with humanistic modes of disciplinary discourse that complement the predominantly quantitative procedures of their departmental disciplines” (Goodlad 2000, p.10). Such a

science-technology and humanities nexus can enable them to synthesize their experiences as well as look at their major program of studies in ethical context, in the historical context of the development of their disciplines (history of science, of technology, and of medicine), in the epistemological context of their disciplines (philosophy of science). The approach is essentially integrative and aims at putting academic competence to practice through students' participation in activities so that they can achieve operational competence.

As to the existing provision of the humanities at ICSTM, students are required to take up a humanities subject from a range of courses in humanities and languages to meet the credit requirements of its degree programs. Most teaching is provided as lateral enrichment-courses running in parallel to students' departmental courses in science, technology, and medicine. They are arranged into four clusters – courses dealing directly with the fundamental nature of science, technology and medicine; courses dealing with ideas, events, and artefacts of intellectual interest to all people; courses developing practical skills against a theoretical background; language courses preparing students to expose themselves directly to the full complexity of other countries and cultures.

The Humanities Program, replicated from MIT, is also being offered at such other prestigious institutions as California Institute of Technology (Caltech), Georgia Tech, Columbia University, Ransselaer Polytechnic, University of Maryland. Notably, MIT's humanities component accounts for 25 per cent of its total credit hours while in Caltech it is 22 per cent. In the US, nationally the rate is 22.86 per cent (Goodlad 2000; also, Webb 2008). ICSTM's Humanities Committee is of the view that all students should be allowed to take 10 per cent of their total 1200 credit hours from the humanities segments. This substantiates the claim that science-based liberal education allows and encourages students to see science in context, and all institutions that aspire for international clout 'must' follow in MIT, Caltech, and ICSTM's trails.

Evidently, the domains of professional and liberal education are no longer mutually exclusive; the old boundaries dividing them are receding; some specific professional programs are embracing educational goals that feature attributes of liberal learning. Hutton (2006, P. 56 ) cites Utica College as an example that has restructured its business faculty curriculum to include liberal education attributes, and this is how Utica's Department of Business and Economics describes its academic and curricular missions: "Our strong

foundation in liberal arts strengthens a student's writing, speaking, analytical, and interpersonal skills. Technology, ethics, leadership, and a global perspective are integrated in both foundation courses and in advanced study of business and economics." It looks like a business course has assumed liberal identity. As well as many USA accreditation bodies that target a broad-based education have adopted a liberal education orientation. As for example, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business has included in its accreditation standards a number of requirements pertaining to liberal learning. The indispensable strengths it recommends should include developing written and oral communication skills; critical thinking skills and their application to unstructured problems; an ability to appreciate arts, literature, and history. Instead of considering liberal education impractical or a luxury, American Colleges and Universities' Project on Accreditation and Assessment (PAA) and its four specialized accrediting agencies in PAA (business, education, engineering, and nursing) are unanimous that in order for each of these professions to succeed, it needs a strong liberal education orientation. Notably, these agencies have "established standards and procedures that place a high priority on liberal education in the accreditation of these specialized programs" (Hutton 2006, P. 57).

Naturally, as a result of such integration, professional as well as career-oriented education is nowadays more a 'continuum' that incorporates the liberal arts as well as specific knowledge and skills in a professional field. As professions are increasingly getting oriented to "the language and intellectual goals of the liberal arts", in this context, it might be noted that "where professional study was once about learning how to 'do' and liberal arts was once about learning how to 'think', the professions have made a concerted effort to bring 'doing' and 'thinking' closer together within their own curricula" (Hutton 2006, p. 57). As for example, the English program at Utica College is striving to reduce the "divide between 'thinking' and 'doing', between the theoretical and practical, and between intrinsic and extrinsic value" (ibid). It is preparing students for such professions as teaching, graduate research, business, civil service, law, publishing and for graduate work in English language, English as a second language, linguistics, literature, or writing.

Barr (1999, pp. 23-24) explores the question of disciplinary integration and invents an innovative model called "neo-dialecticism" in order to strike a happy disciplinary alliance between the humanities ("soft subjective arts") and the "'hard', objective, practical, and vocationally-oriented world of professions." Through logical dualism or opposites that exist in all facets of life he brings to the fore the question of coexistence between

humanitarianism and utilitarianism. The former represents the humanities that are “idea-generating, interpretive ...diverse and non-conforming, and on the other hand, holistic, synthetic, integrative, social and contextual”; the latter stands for vocational or practical fields that are “logical, analytical ... exclusionary ... and individualistic” (Barr 1999, p. 24). The neo-dialectic model shows how they can counterbalance each other’s action and influences. Practical sciences offer the humanities’ irrational humanitarian component the avenue to keep its unbridled growth in check within the bounds of reality or real life. Also, the “creative role of the arts has a theoretical and social glue-like effect that provides a coherent vision on the one hand, and on the other, plays a practical role in counterbalancing the applied vocational disciplines” (ibid, p. 25) through its criticizing and questioning attributes.

Grubb & Lazerson (2005) chalk out further important strategies how integration between the profession and humanities education can be achieved. First, by shifting the focus of vocationalism to graduate study as well as minimizing the pressure of professionalism to undergraduate curriculum, a minimum of integration between liberal and vocational education can be achieved. Policy-makers, university administrators and above all the bodies of employers with an emphasis on the bottom line favour vocational education as it can fulfil pure utilitarian goals. This is one reason the demand for vocational education at undergraduate levels is too intense, and it is hardly possible for liberal education to emulate vocational education at this level unless undergraduate students can resist the pressure of vocation. In the US context, some elite private universities such as Harvard, Stanford, Berkeley, Michigan, Swarthmore, and Amherst where the liberal intellectual and moral traditions are most vibrant can “afford the luxury of avoiding explicitly vocationalized undergraduate curriculums since for many of their students a vocational curriculum awaits them in graduate school” (Grubb & Lazerson 2005, p. 10).

Another way to achieve integration is by discarding narrow vocationalism that undermines genuine professionalism as well as trivializes higher education’s civic and intellectual roles. Professionalism understood in its broader perspectives includes liberal education in its real spirit and import. Professional education as well as preparation cannot ignore ethical and philosophical issues. Above all, professionals are responsible citizens in society; once they are trained, alongside their professional preparation, in civic responsibilities, they can perform greater role in society. As Grubb and Lazerson (2005, p.

17) put it, “Professionalism – the vocationalism of higher education – thus provides a logical entry to many elements of liberal education, one that can be exploited through interdisciplinary courses and general education courses that acknowledge the professional aspirations of students.”

In fact, professional expertise and a knowledge of the humanities complement each other and such a claim is justified when different professional bodies bring identical complaints as to the quality of professional preparation students undergo during their schooling. Critics fault “professional schools for providing the wrong kinds of skills ... plagued by a bloated curriculum, a surfeit of facts, an emphasis on rote memory and on the technical aspects of profession” (Grubb & Lazerson 2005, p. 13). In fact, doctors and other professionals have to have the “capacity to recognize, rather than seeing” (ibid, 13); they have to be able to work in interdisciplinary teams; they need to communicate effectively and appropriately that in turn requires interpersonal skills. Above all, they require critical thinking, reflection, and problem-solving skills. A closer scrutiny of this scenario clearly reveals that professional preparations lack orientation to the humanities and such a lacking can only be corrected through an integration of the latter into professional education.

Area studies, as an interdisciplinary academic discipline, entails studying or researching specific area or region. Area studies often involve the disciplines of history, political science, sociology, cultural studies, languages, geography, literature, and other fields. A study of languages of the region concerned is an essential first step in any area studies project as languages have helped preserve and recover the past traditions as well as to resituate them in their present perspectives. In addition to studying languages, area studies exercise involves interdisciplinary and comparativist approaches, and humanists scholars are “drawn to analysis of the interplay between society and culture” (Brann 2006, p. 10); it facilitates ways for the area studies humanists to “rub shoulders with social scientists who share their interests in a particular region” (ibid, p. 8). Area studies enterprise undertaken by humanists may be of great importance to politicians, policy-makers who specially deal with external policy. It becomes much more important if the enterprise has to deal with any conflict zones such as the Middle East. American politicians and diplomats, who consider this region “little more than a zone of internal and external conflict”, look to “our ranks for confirmation of their attitudes or for providing them with the next generation of linguistically prepared policy analysts” (ibid,

## 5.4 Socio-cultural relevance

Pascoe (2003) outlines the relevance of the humanities and their constructive roles in fostering as well as bringing about socio-cultural transformation, progressive political adaptation, formation of forward-looking national and intellectual identity through self-assertion, and shedding regressive past and replacing it with innovative present and future. Recalling how at Australian universities the undergraduate humanities curriculums and scholarship have gone through refurbishing since World War II to suit local interest, Pascoe (2003, pp. 9-10) maintains that the revamped curriculum mainly dealing with social problems reshaped the way planners and policymakers, most of whom products of the humanities and social sciences disciplines, would look at social issues, thus paving the way for greater contribution to national life: “The causes that animate Australians in the 2000s – reconciliation, the Green Movement, feminism, the Republic – all draw on the work of Australian scholars. These insights into humanity do not merely reflect versions of reality, but have a way of changing how Australians have seen the world, and therefore how they act in it.” In addition, the overwhelming number of arts graduates that came out of the universities in the 1950s and 1960s helped extend the civil society, and Australia became a more humanised society. Rote learning and “bullying gave way to creativity as well as understanding that in turn enhanced tolerance towards cultural and religious differences. Xenophobia and sectarianism between the Catholic and the Protestant diminished. Notably, if universities provide merely a pragmatic curriculum, their influence on society remains rigidly economic, and not cultural, political or social” (Pascoe, p. 10). Such a socio-cultural and political potential, latent only in the arts and humanities, has traditionally supplied the “creative and critical core”, and Pascoe appears to be right when he says that mainly “with a strong investment in the Humanities and Social Sciences could universities ameliorate the dominant utilitarian tradition of tertiary education ...” (ibid, p. 9).

Katey (2007) quotes C S Lewis as saying: “Friendship is unnecessary - like philosophy, like art - it has no survival value; rather, it is one of those things that give value to survival.” Katey (2007; also, Lynch 2008; Tucker 2008) is appreciative of the intrinsic and social value of the arts and cites a number of related findings confirmed through research in the USA. In addition to their aesthetic values, they improve day-to-day lives; “can augment education, reduce crime rates, improve our health and boost the economy”

(Katey 2007, p. 19). An arts program for ‘at-risk youth’ in Florida involving reading, creative writing and dance helped reduce juvenile crimes and repeat crimes by 27 percent and 64, respectively. In this regard, Katey quotes Dana Gioia, the chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts: “We must banish the stereotype that reading books or listening to music is passive behavior. Art is not escapism but an invitation to activism” (cited in Katey 2007, p. 19). Artists and art lovers, people who read, listen to music are more devoted to altruistic activities. Nowadays doctors and psychologists resort to art and music therapy to treat illness or trauma, indicating that “art and music activity have (sic) significant soothing psychological benefits. So art not only benefits schools and communities, but also has tremendous effects on an individual level” (Katey 2007, p. 19). In this regard, Australia’s TAC (Transport Accident Commission) newsletter (2009, p. 1) emphatically announces that the “arts can transform, excite, motivate, infuriate, fascinate, move, amuse, reassure and calm us. Arts can feed the soul and mind and fill your heart. Arts can help us understand how we fit into this world and create opportunity for others to understand us.”

## **5.5 Commentary**

As it appears, the worth of humanities graduates can significantly be enhanced through developing in them attributes such as generic skills or attitudes. Such skills are important in that they are not mainly related to what students know about the content of their courses but to their ability to use what they know or what they can do. The uniqueness of the humanities education in equipping its graduates with intrinsic skills is that most of the time they are not consciously imparted and are not exclusively subject-or content-specific. Successful completion of a degree is generally a proof that they possess these attributes. While it does not preclude its graduates acquiring subject specific disciplinary knowledge, the additional intrinsic skills they achieve make their educational profiles much more wide-ranging than those acquired in other purely job-specific disciplines. Such a broader framework of skills is believed to facilitate on-the-job training in business and industry.

This Section reinforces some important intrinsic skills that are specific to humanities education. As already articulated, the humanities are unique in imparting superior writing and linguistic skills, improved skills in reading, note-taking, information gathering, and summarising. Also, this Section makes it apparent that the humanities are able to improve students’ logical, rational argumentative, and analytical skills; besides, they get trained to expose the strengths and weaknesses in different types of discourses and arguments.

Alongside their aesthetic and creative values, they are able to serve different social and altruistic needs.

Although the humanities possess intrinsic value, this does not mean that development of such skills should always eventuate through happy coincidence. Conscious curriculum reforms, innovation, pedagogical change are also required to develop them in the students. In this regard, the humanities courses need to put more emphasis on writing by requiring students to do written projects; participate in writing and editing exercises. Students can improve linguistic skills through studying literature or allied courses that involve writing, editing, and manipulating the use of language. Fieldworks, job placements, learning by doing, and such other practical activities can equip students with employable skills. Curriculum innovation to incorporate practical or professional components such as internships, technological subjects, courses from adjoining areas can reorient non-viable courses towards tangible use.

The Section prescribes pedagogical changes the humanities must undergo to remain relevant. The students need to have more participation in the learning process through active learning. There should be increased emphasis on improved teaching practices and this can go a long way to compensate for the humanities' inherent disciplinary weaknesses that preclude academic rigours. As well as more emphasis should be given to intellectual rigours to compensate for their disciplinary weaknesses. Measure should be undertaken so that the humanities students are well educated in their own fields. The humanities should be made the core of all disciplines by using their overriding attributes such as cultural and intellectual superiority as well as their overall integrative value.

The humanists must overcome the current disciplinary stagnation or insularity by accepting changes that are occurring in other fields as well as by expanding their disciplinary base to uncharted areas. As well as they must come out of their traditional disciplinary boundaries and accept contradictions. They should shed their highbrow attitudes and be ready to accept challenges by extending their sphere of influence from their current theoretical preoccupation to tangible problem solving exercise. In this regard, the humanists should take into consideration demographic and socio-economic changes and adjust or reorient their disciplines and their curriculums accordingly. They should consider who their students and what their socio-economic backgrounds are. As for example, humanities courses such as leadership may attract the older students and enhance the former's use

value; as research has established, the humanities graduates can become better leaders through formal qualifications in leadership.

There should be attempts policy-wise to bring about an equilibrium between the supply of humanities graduates and their demand in the community. If employment is the primary goal (and obviously it appears to be the case in the case of majority graduates), their supply in the job market needs to be realistically determined through appropriate survey and the resultant data so that they do not face undue stress due to non-availability of sufficient job openings. As well as courses without ready employability should be offered selectively or mainly to students who can resist employment pressure. However, here arises the moral dilemma of egalitarianism which only the humanities can ensure and restricting educational opportunities.

Purely job-based training has its limitations and as such there should be a clear-cut line of demarcation between job training and education as empowerment for survival in a complex world. As well as purely job oriented training for specific careers may put graduates at risk in today's job market as skills requirements are fluid and quickly changeable. Also, the current attitude to define success purely on monetary terms has its flaws as it excludes success earned through creativity and intellectual excellence. In fact, vocation and technology-related courses constitute only a part of the total education process. For a fully-functional society and for fuller development of individuals in any society, the education system, with proper attention to the humanities, should be geared to equip citizens with multifarious of skills.

It is true that the core humanistic disciplines such as literature, philosophy have lost their natural or spontaneous appeal due to esoteric and recondite treatment by pedantic critics and scholars. Literature should be treated as literature that flows out of human creativity and imagination. To treat works of imagination in an artificial way or to use them to show off deliberate pedantry means depleting them of genial pleasure and human interest. It is time to go back to literature's natural attributes, and teaching literature as literature will revive students' interest in it. Similarly, subjects such as philosophy need to shed off their esoteric character and their practitioners should make them accessible as well as intellectually manageable by presenting them in lucid forms.

The efficacy of interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, cross-disciplinary cooperation, alignment and merger, needless to say, goes a great deal in favour of the humanities as they cannot maintain enough clout in the current knowledge regime dramatically transformed by commercialization of knowledge. The reinterpretation of the humanities from academic and humanitarian perspectives can open up new roles and avenues for these disciplines. The humanists need to exploit this particular attribute of their field to their overall benefit. Area studies, essentially an interdisciplinary dispensation with the humanities being the lead discipline, can enhance, for example, the relevance of the humanities in a globalized world where knowledge of different peoples and regions is vital to cross-national understanding and communication.

This Segment shows how the sciences-technology and humanities nexus can be beneficial to each other and open up further prospects for the humanities. It is quite credible to say that the humanities can complement the purely fact-based quantitative procedures of the technology and science-based disciplines with their humanistic and intellectualised modes of disciplinary discourse. Humanistic knowledge, tempered with ethical, philosophical and historical dimensions, can help refine and humanise scientific and technological knowledge that mainly possesses concrete application value. This Part sheds light on how humanistic and scientific knowledge can be synthesised in a healthier way to the benefit of both the disciplines. Such a congenial synthesis may eventuate by striking a balance between operational and academic competences. Also, such disciplinary conflation must emphasize the theory-practice interconnection as well as such other skills as are characteristic to humanities disciplines – leadership, communication, presentation and writing skills. AT ICSTM, it is achieved through humanities courses being integrated into mainstream science-technology courses or through offering purely parallel humanities courses. In offering foreign language and related courses in tandem with science and technology disciplines, there should be ample focus on cultural and other socio-economic aspects of the linguistic regions concerned.

Humanities education is really broad-based and it is evident how other scientific and business-related disciplines are coming closer to the humanities by accepting the latter's curriculum and learning goals. Such a synthesis is closing in the gap among different disparate branches of knowledge. In this regard, the Utica experience is a superb example of how meaningful cross-disciplinary collaboration is able to improve the prospects of the humanities. The way the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business has

embraced the same collaborative ethos lends further credence to the fact that the humanities can improve their relevance through meaningful academic cooperation. This subscribes to the belief that different branches of knowledge constitute a common continuum; different branches of knowledge are not a separate entity; they are rather complementary to, interdependent on and contributory to each other.

The clash between liberal education and professional training gets exacerbated only when professionally qualified persons are considered to have only skill-based knowledge. In reality, professional skills are not enough for success in life. As citizens, professional people definitely need higher attributes which may come through a synthesis between the humanities and vocational education. As well as it is seen that pure occupational preparations are not enough for the professionals to perform their responsibilities. Different professional bodies such as American Association of Colleges of Nursing, American Association of Law Schools, and Association of American Medical Colleges have already recognized that the training and knowledge these professionally trained people possess are not sufficient; these professional bodies have already expressed concerns in this regard and recommend that their members' knowledge be complemented through humanities-based knowledge and education. To complement their professional education, these professionals, as recommended by their respective professional bodies, need higher order interpersonal or interactive skills, high level of linguistic literacy, both oral and written communication competencies, analytical skills as well as critical literacy (Grubb & Lazerson 2005).

## **5.6 The humanities-knowledge economy nexus**

Despite opposition from the traditionalists, humanists such as Rob and Bullen (2004, p. 1) seem to be awake to the “wealth of entrepreneurial opportunities” a ‘techno-economic’ paradigm of knowledge can add to the arts and humanities. They recognise the economic value of knowledge and decry learning for the preservation of knowledge or for its own sake as sheer luxury or waste of time and money. In fact, at a time when the economy and technology have taken the centre-stage, it is of no use for the humanities scholars to “spend their time labouring over Marxist detritus” (Rob & Bullen 2004, p. 2). Such pursuits are nothing but “past-directed” and reveal a “blanket-like mentality” (ibid, p. 3).

In fact, the humanities are able to make contribution to the knowledge economy or to the real world in economic or utilitarian terms by embracing the all-pervasive forces of commercialisation, managerialism and innovation strategy (Rob & Bullen 2004, pp. 3-4). The commercial success of the creative industry “provide[s] at least one means by which the humanities can demonstrate their economic contribution” (Anyanwu 2004, p. 74). Needless to say, the future of such other disciplines as English, history, and cultural studies hinges, to a great extent, on their ability to align themselves to the needs and expediencies of knowledge economy. Anyanwu (2004, p.71) cites “instances of the humanities thriving” as well as foresees ‘opportunities’ for them to grow; and these “opportunities draw on the notion that the humanities must partner or perish.” He brings to the fore the inescapability of the challenges of the knowledge economy with the help of a Swahili maxim: “When you see your neighbour being shaved by force and you are next, you might as well wet your hair so as to make it easy on you” (cited in Anyanwu 2004 , p. 71).

Anyanwu (2004) puts stress on the need for readjustment or reorientation of the humanities and considers defining the humanities disciplines broadly. He emphasises the term ‘new humanities’ and is not inclined to reduce his version of the humanities only to traditional disciplines such as philosophy, history, and literature. Nor is he ready to limit their purview exclusively to such aspects as critical analysis, the preservation and transmission of tradition, and questioning and maintaining ethical values. This researcher recommends a “hybridisation process” (Anyanwa 2004, p. 74) that requires closer interaction between science-technology on the one hand and the humanities on the other; and it enables both the sectors to work in tandem with each other within an environment conducive to the economic values of the humanities. This hybridisation process expands the sphere of the humanities to work in a technological ambit that requires an understanding of how the application of technology clashes with human ethical values or how scientific applications can make use of cues from historical precedent.

Verily, the humanities can survive in and contribute to the knowledge economy through cooperation, convergence, collaboration and creative integration. Anyanwu (2004) cites two examples of how the humanities can forge cooperation, convergence and collaboration across disciplines within and beyond the university environment. The Convergent Communications Research Group (CCRG), formed in 2002 at the University of Adelaide, and the Bachelor of Media Program at the same university are two such cases of creative interdisciplinarity across the humanities-sciences divide.

The CCRG is a ‘convergence’ of professionals from such different disciplines as engineering, economics, telecommunications, law, humanities, and the group carries on research in areas in which its members have expertise. Although its members belong to disparate groups, they plan and execute projects jointly, and their main philosophy is collaboration that calls for everyone to play a role “in any activity that impacts on society. This stance does not involve a simplistic approach to issues, but challenges every member’s specialist skills in aligning to common goal” (Anyanwu 2004, p. 76).

Anyanwu (2004) exemplifies how the CCRG works in a collaborative and interdisciplinary setting. A project on 3G mobile phone is a case that is logically situated within the telecommunication department. However, when the question of its application and implementation arises, such issues as its cost-benefit, socio-cultural implications, legal issues, the issue of consumer welfare need to be considered. In this case, the project cuts across law, humanities, and economics. While the engineer deals with the project’s technical rigour, the lawyer handles its legal aspects; the economist evaluates economic and financial implications while the humanities scholar assesses socio-cultural ramifications. Although it is physically located within the humanities, its execution involves all other disciplines in the research group. Notably, the way the CCRG project as well as its *modus operandi* and philosophy work echoes the operation of knowledge or convergence economy, an economy that relies on intellectual collaboration and collective social obligation. As Anyanwu puts it, such a collaborative research project works as per the workings of a “creative milieu” which is a “critical mass of entrepreneurs” where “intellectuals, social activists, artists, administrators, power brokers or students can operate in an open-minded, cosmopolitan context and where face to face interaction creates new ideas, artefacts, products, services and institutions and as a consequence contributes to economic success” (Landry 2000, cited in Anyanwu 2004, pp. 77-78).

The Bachelor of Media program is an interdisciplinary degree course located within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the University of Adelaide. Set upon similar collaborative ethos, the course cuts across some other faculties within the university as well as industry. Its success depends on collaboration and cooperation with professionals from disciplines outside the traditional humanities enclave. As for example, its radio broadcast specialisation is designed and offered in conjunction with Radio Adelaide; the television segment is designed and taught in collaboration with ABC (Australian

Broadcasting Corporation) and Adelaide Institute of Technical and Further Education. The Aboriginal media specialisation is conducted in concert with the Centre for Aboriginal Studies; the multimedia specialisation is taught in conjunction with the Schools of Engineering and Architecture; the creative writing and publishing unit is jointly taught with the Department of English. The School of Commerce jointly teaches media management, marketing and electronic commerce components of the program. This is how students are “exposed to a variety of professional areas of specialization, which prepares them for the challenges of future employment and opens up a new paradigm in academic collaboration” (Anyanwu 2004, p. 79).

The benefits of such collaboration in teaching and scholarship for the humanities are immense. While in isolation they cannot carry proper weight and command enough critical mass, they can, in collaboration with other disciplines, increase their chances of survival in the knowledge economy regime. Besides, such collaboration is able to widen skill and knowledge base which is good for graduates and their employment prospect. Such arrangements pave the way for innovation in designing courses with high employment prospects as well as collaborating with other disciplines that have new job market oriented courses. In this regard, what Anyanwu (2000, p. 80) says appears to be apt and pertinent: “A key to the future of the humanities in the knowledge economy resides in a collaborative alliance between the humanities broadly defined [the ‘old’ and the ‘new’] and other disciplines. ... we should look at collaborative ventures from a Gestaltian perspective which says that the whole is greater than the sum of its component parts.”

Redshaw (2004, p. 94) attempts to invent new roles for the humanities by reconceptualising their worth in terms of social relevance, and she talks about reliable or “socially robust knowledge” that engages itself with “the social world more openly and directly.” In the case of the humanities, socially robust knowledge, unlike traditional knowledge, entails partnership with science and technology; and this partnership is built “in terms of instrumentality or economic gain”, or “social responsiveness to community concerns”( Redshaw 2004, p. 94; also, Nowotny 2001). Through such interdisciplinary collaboration knowledge will be commercially useful, and at the same time social responsiveness will save the humanities from being a mere handmaiden to commercialisation, an accusation frequently labelled by the traditionalists.

A research project entitled *Driving Cultures* (Conducted by Dr Sarah Redshaw and Dr Zoe Sofoulis, Centre for Cultural Research, School of cultural Histories and Futures, University of Western Sydney, Australia) exemplifies how the humanities, through use of socially robust knowledge, can contribute to the knowledge economy by preserving, as the authors claim, the distinctive as well as innate characteristics of the arts and humanities. This Project looks at driving more from a collective or community point of view and studies the influence of culture, community ethos, societal habits on the driving habits of young people in the society concerned. Unlike traditional approaches that assess driving safety at an individual level using quantifiable statistics, or a cognitive approach that focuses on the individual, this project puts greater importance on social connectivity, collective beliefs or on a driving culture or the community as a whole. It draws on “cultural studies, social psychology, philosophy, and social studies of technology, and utilizes semiotic analysis” (Redshaw 2004, p. 95). Driving cultures as represented in contemporary literature, films and television commercials, and road safety campaigns are also evaluated and exploited. The main objective of the project is to recreate a safe driving culture by confronting and assessing the cultural values and, above all, “raising awareness of the beliefs and assumptions that driving cultures construct and the dangerous consequences they may have” (ibid).

Using a method dubbed the “cultural learning approach”, this Project focuses on peer learning through “participation ... in an interactive framework of facilitated discussion and analysis of the social nature of activities such as driving” (Redshaw 2004, p. 95). This method brings together knowledge and expertise from the humanities and different other fields and “applies them to a social problem, in this case road safety” (ibid). This approach is copyrighted which indicates its value as ‘intellectual capital’, and as such it is a marketable product. However, its initial objective remains potential benefit to the community. It has been transformed into an intellectual product by adding value to it through efforts so that “it stand[s] out within particular context. An approach that looks at cultures of driving rather than individual drivers has great potential in informing education campaigns and programs” (ibid, p. 96).

The above ‘approach’ has attained potential economic values in conformity with the knowledge economy paradigm although the primary objective of the project under which it evolved was not conscious income generation. Unlike industry-university collaboration that starts off with financial benefit in sight, it began with knowledge generation and

community benefit as its main objective. Such initiatives having their interest in the humanities can cut across different disciplines, even with insights from science and technology, and can make the humanities receptive to the knowledge economy without creating any confrontation between utilitarian and intellectual or academic agenda. Redshaw's observation in this regard sheds more important light on the point: "Clearly, an engagement with the social in the context of business, government, and community organizations offers the arts and humanities the prospect of responsiveness to *community* interests and concerns that will result in different kinds of benefits for the communities" (Redshaw 2004, p. 98).

Such commercialisation of knowledge with a new emphasis on social and community benefit, although despised by many traditionalists, may augur well for the future of the humanities. By bringing about a happy, refined and acceptable alliance between commerce and the humanities, the current antagonism between them can be minimised. Instead of arraigining such initiatives as mere business ventures, they can be looked as "opportunities for social development, for helping people to live better lives" (ibid).

### **5.6.1 Commentary**

Interdisciplinary collaboration, again, has the greatest prospect for the humanities in bringing them closer to other practical-oriented disciplines. Convergence and collaboration between the humanities and other disciplines, as demonstrated through the two projects at the University of Adelaide, can enhance their utilitarian value as well as employability. As the case study of these two projects shows, the humanities can enhance their relevance and utilitarian value through collaboration with technology, law, economics, management, and media. Such cases of disciplinary cooperation give important clues to how university curriculums can be designed to suit the knowledge economy paradigm. These two projects also demonstrate how the attributes of knowledge production under Mode 2 – transdisciplinarity, heterogeneity, reflexivity, application, problem-solving – can be put to practical use.

Redshaw's socially robust knowledge, also based on disciplinary collaboration, can improve the relevance of the humanities in terms of both economic value and social responsiveness. The Driving Culture Project exemplifies how disciplinary collaboration involving the humanities can situate the latter in social context to solve community issue.

When the humanities can get engaged, through cooperation with other disciplines, in solving problems of collective natures, they can attain social relevance, albeit without compromising their inherent value. The latter aspect can save the humanities from being commercialized in its crude form. Any utilitarian motives that encompass nobler missions or collective community wellbeing should not be discouraged.

### **5.6.2 Creative Industry-knowledge economy nexus**

As Jeffcutt (2005, *p. 105*) puts it, “Over the five years in particular, influential national [UK]... and transnational [EC]... reports have recognized the value [measured by employment and turnover] and dynamism [measured by growth] of creative work to contemporary economies.” The creative industries are thus a “desirable feature of vitality in a knowledge society – not only valuable but also cool and sophisticated” (*ibid*, *p. 104*), and the sector makes a robust contribution to western economies, especially to the UK economy, with regard to its value, volume and activities. It adds 170 billion euros (five percent of total GDP) to the UK economy a year; employs 1.3 million and the current growth is twice the rate of the rest of the economy (*ibid*).

Cunningham (2004) further explores the creative industry-knowledge economy nexus and dwells on how the humanities can make significant contribution to the knowledge economy. He is of the opinion that “[c]reative production and cultural consumption are an integral part of the new economy, as are the disciplines that educate, train, and research these activities,” and the creative industries, if treated with greater priority or foregrounded in policy, can add value to the humanities and the social sciences (Cunningham 2004, *p. 117*). The field’s importance will be more pronounced as it will be the main source of content required for the growth of next generation information and communication technology. As to the sector’s economic viability, Cunningham (2004, *p. 118*; also, Cunningham 2005) says: “We can no longer afford to understand the social and creative disciplines as commercially irrelevant, merely ‘civilizing’ activities. Instead, they must be recognized as one of the vanguards of the new economy.” As well as in many countries that include Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Taiwan, the USA, and the UK there is “evidence of creative industries being at least contemplated as an R&D [Research and Development] sector” (Cunningham 2005, *pp. 97-98*).

In New Zealand context, Grierson (2003, p. 1) attempts to reposition the humanities by envisioning a “marriage of the arts and industry in a global economy”; she “draws attention to the underpinning philosophies behind the imperative to fold the arts into the industrial paradigm of economic knowledge” and examines what this ‘paradigm’ may mean for the arts and the humanities. This author attempts a “teleological [the explanation of phenomena by the purpose they serve rather than by postulated causes] reframing” of knowledge attained through the humanities in the context of the global knowledge economy as well as ‘deterritorialisation’ of technology (Grierson 2003, p. 4).

In New Zealand and elsewhere, alongside biotechnology, information and telecommunication technology, the arts have been identified as industry, and creativity and innovation, vital aspects of the arts, have been realigned with an “economic model of enterprise and sustainable development” (ibid, p. 6). Instead of the tentativeness associated with creativity that guides the arts, the “arts as industries are driven by the assumed certainty of a teleological end-point of productive worth and economic value. The means-end relationship is linked and legitimated inevitably and instrumentally to state productivity” (ibid). The distinctiveness as well as authenticity of the culture of each country is exploited and awarded a market value and “cultural practices such as visual arts, music, performance become technologies of productive enterprise packaged for global consumption” (ibid).

In response to the cultures industries’ phenomenal growth in the global economy, in Australia, alongside different public and private initiatives, The Queensland University of Technology(QUT) has opened its Creative Industries Faculty and Research Centre (CIRAC) and, with the support of the Queensland Government, a Creative Industries Precinct. Humanities students at QUT have a number of study options that include “Acting/Technical Production, Communication Design, Creative Writing and Cultural Studies, Dance, Fashion, Film and Television, Journalism, Media Communication, Music and Sound, Theatre Studies, and Visual Arts” (Bullen et al 2004, p. 13). Such programmes are able to “equip graduates for employment in Australia's leisure, entertainment, cultural, and creative sectors” (Bullen *et al* 2004, p. 13).

Through such academic orientation, although it is not able to produce knowledge workers per se, QUT is producing the “new cultural intermediaries” of the knowledge economy who are “involved in the production, marketing, and dissemination of symbolic goods” (ibid). This, to say, is a significant move towards realigning arts and humanities related

knowledge to the techno-economic exigencies of the knowledge economy. It shows how graduates in these disciplines can be equipped with skills, i.e. creating the “content-provision for the new technologies” to improve their employability. This alignment “delivers a fresh angle on the old dualisms. Creative industries are an integral part of the new economy, not only a way to understand and manage it”; it also offers new light on the increased cooperation or nexus between “cultural democracy and economic development” (Bullen *et al* 2004, p. 13)

However, negative criticisms against the above reconfiguration are not few and far between. Such an arts-commerce nexus (arts being applied and having economic value) puts at stake the concept of civic humanism that is inherent in the fine arts, public culture, and the academy. In the traditional fashion, McRobbie (2002) advocates the status quo and points out the dangers inherent in such an arts as well as techno-economy nexus. Bullen *et al* (2004, p. 14) are also cautious and say that such an orientation will not bode well for the traditional humanities and creative arts knowledge when these disciplines are forced to fit into the current knowledge economy paradigm; knowledge will rather remain ‘circumscribed’. The other concern they seem to legitimately express relates to some core humanities subjects that remain excluded from such an orientation. They are the traditional and new humanities disciplines such as languages, literary studies, classical studies, gender studies, Australian Studies, mediaeval studies, philosophy, and cultural studies, and it remains unclear how they, for example, fit into this new paradigm. Jeffcutt (2005 p. 105) thinks putting greater emphasis on cultural economy leads to a “phase of convergence in global capitalism in which goods and services are becoming ‘aestheticized’ and culture and leisure are becoming commodified.”

The culture industries have ostensible obstacles in the less developed countries to become economically viable as they mainly depend on or are “generally subject to the effects of [Ernst] Engels’ Law, which suggests that as disposable income expands so consumption of non-essential or luxury products will rise at a disproportionately higher rate. Hence, the richer the country, the higher expenditure on cultural products will be as a fraction of families’ budgets” ( Power & Scott 2004, pp. 3-4). As well as cultural products are deemed to have symbolic value and perceived to be elitist. Also, their production and consumption are heavily subsidized and their success and viability are not assessed on the basis of gate money earned or popular attendance. The content industry, the consumption aspect of the creative industry, is heavily dependent on technology, IT, digitalization which developing

countries are yet to get hold of. Above all, its production and diffusion are confined to and monopolized by the USA and the UK and the rest of the world act as importer. As a result, its market competition as well as diffusion is too limited to have global impact.

## **5.7 Enhancing the relevance of the humanities through a humanities-general education nexus**

General education, which is interdisciplinary in nature, emerged in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century “as a curricular movement” (Macconnel 1952, p.2). As a paradigm, it has been shaped by the ‘pressures of the times’; it is wide-ranging in scope, and being a “self-consciously developed and maintained program ... it is marked by ... its emphasis on specific and real problems and issues of immediate concern to students and society ... .” (Miller 1988, p. 5; also, Faust 1950). It is purposeful and goal-oriented with well-defined curriculum goals; it aims at making individual life more meaningful and fulfilling and in order to fulfil this goal, knowledge is used as and when it is needed; it enables the students to act as well as to make intelligent decision about life and existence (Zeszotarski 1999, p. 40; also, MacDougall 2000, p. 239).

Guided by the philosophy of pragmatism or instrumentalism, its curriculum is not motivated by mere rhetoric; need-based as it is, it becomes an effective means of attaining the ‘stated’ curricular goals; it no longer remains a ‘paper curriculum’ and “gives equal weight to the goals, the procedures or methods, and the content of curriculum” (Miller 1988, p. 187). In compliance with its curricular ideals and scope, it does not concern with classroom activities alone. It takes into consideration a students’ total learning environment and the entire community is regarded as the resource for learning. It targets lifelong education and enables students to continue the learning process. With its multiple curriculum and learning approaches, it helps equip students with the ability to think clearly and critically as well as with workable quantitative competence, and high level of communication skills (Zeszotarski 1999, p. 40). It equips them with numeracy skills through mathematics and composition or writing skills through English. It helps students acquire basic skills and general knowledge, core knowledge rather than disciplinary breadth; intelligent act rather than intellectual depth is another of its main objectives (ibid).

Historically, general education as a movement was greatly influenced by the workings and ideals of renaissance humanism (Miller 1988). By mid-twentieth century, it came to associate with naturalistic humanism, which assumes that men and women, being thinking and rational beings with free will, are able to solve own problems without any divine or supernatural intervention. Apparently, naturalistic humanism has the potential to prepare and equip human beings with skills and attributes which they can use to solve social problems.

### **5.7.1 General education: A case study**

Miller (1988) presents the Contemporary Civilization Program at Columbia as a case study of how a general education curriculum based on humanistic approach can be drawn. Columbia College introduced the Contemporary Civilization Program in 1919 with a utilitarian motive in order to meet the challenges posed by new directions after the First World War. What initially was an effort to experiment with reform by applying a humanistic vision to the post-war curriculum issue ultimately turned out to be one of the true programs of general education. As in the case of traditional curriculum objectives, its main objective is not to acquire subject-matter or disciplinary knowledge; “instead, the emphasis is squarely on the development of a student’s ability to *apply* learning to current *problems* and to make more informed *judgment*. This orientation of education for the development of values rather than for the acquisition of knowledge *per se* is important in the development of general education paradigm” (Miller 1988, p. 36). Another aspect was its emphasis on contemporary issues and problems rather than on the study of historical continuation of western cultural heritage.

A much more important aspect of the program was its interdisciplinary approach that involved two departments – history and philosophy. Such an interdisciplinary approach was not a study of two separate disciplines in line with the traditional methodology. Here interdisciplinarity meant commingling or integrating the contents of two disciplines in a healthy and mutual way in order to solve stated problems or to build complementary knowledge base. Its organization aimed at uniting means and end; methods and objective. And an “emphasis on method and its direct tie to the course’s objective” that would unify means and ends “was one of its distinguishing features that set it apart from the traditional curriculum of liberal education program” (ibid, p. 40). In fact, the curriculum was explicitly student-centric and the Program’s legacy lay in the methods that were devised to

attain the program's objectives. Although interdisciplinary in nature, its course objective was not to survey the subject matter in history, philosophy, economics, government; "instead, it applied the inherent perspectives and methods of these disciplines to reach a new goal: helping the student understand his present-day world so that he could more effectively value, make judgments, and participate in the world" (Miller 1988, p. 41).

### **5.7.2 An experiment on general education paradigm at the University of Wisconsin**

The Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin (1927) experimented to demonstrate how some of the major assumptions about the old liberal education paradigm could be redirected and reorganized as the humanistic approach to general education. Moulded under the educational philosophy of newer naturalistic humanism, the experiment did not solely attempt to get students trained, in the tradition of liberal education, in abstract logic or transmitting western culture only. Instead, it aimed at exposing the student to some experience of how the intellectual processes could be applied to the problems of everyday life. With this end in view, the Program's mentor and initiator, Alexander Meiklejohn, himself a firm believer in naturalistic humanism, moved away from the traditional humanistic approach to naturalistic approach, the goal of which was to instil in individual students "social values and predisposition to social action" applicable to the solution of everyday life. He was opposed to specialization and fragmentation of curriculum and emphasized a "holistic understanding of the relationships that are involved in a human community" (Miller 1988, pp. 43-4).

In the course of his experiment with his new curriculum model Meiklejohn changed his curriculum ideal of making of the common mind into the goal of teaching of general intelligence. To him, intelligence meant "readiness for any human situation; it is the power ... to see, in any set of circumstances, the best response which a human being can make to those circumstances" (Cited in Miller 1988, p. 45). In this regard, what differentiated his curriculum from that of liberal education was the former's stress on practical problems with immediate social implications, not on abstract logic as the rationalists do. Its actual goal was "the building up of self-direction ... trying to create or cultivate intelligence, capable of being applied in any field whatever" (ibid). In this regard, Miller quotes Meiklejohn as saying that the main curriculum objective was not to educate scholars; its objective primarily being the education of common men, with success being measured not

by the standards of what scholars do, “but in terms of the kind of thinking which all men are called upon to do in the enduring relations of life” (Miller, p. 45).

Meiklejohn considered the existing discipline-based knowledge insufficient to achieve his curriculum goal. He attempted to identify a scheme of reference with regard to what to choose and how to teach, and accordingly, the study of two civilizations – the freshmen year concentrating on Athens in the fifth century BC while the second year on nineteenth century America – was undertaken. The objective was to enable students to learn about two civilizations of different times so that they could “gain a better understanding of what constitutes a civilization and learn to apply these insights as ‘an instrument of intelligent human living’” (ibid, p. 46).

Although the curriculum aimed, through a juxtaposition of two civilizations, at the traditional purpose of learning the present through a knowledge of the past, in reality it aimed at much greater curriculum objective – to analyze “how at different times and in different situations [people] dealt with the problems that confront all cultures. Problem-solving emerged as the real *content* of the curriculum, with the readings in Greek and American culture serving to provide the *context* for study” (ibid). As Meiklejohn himself put it, “... what we wish our students to do is not primarily an acquaintance with the Greek situation, but an acquaintance with the Greek mind, a sense of Greek intelligence at work on its situation” (Cited in Miller 1988, p. 46).

### **5.7.3 Pragmatism, instrumentalism, and progressive education**

The advocates of pragmatism believe that society is forward-looking and individuals can contribute a lot to the transformation of society through knowledge as knowledge and action are interrelated. Knowledge originates in social context and is instrumental in social transformation that aims at resolving the problems of life. In fact, to the pragmatist, education bears little significance as a “concept except as it exists as a relationship between a learner and a goal” (Miller 1988, p. 58). John Dewey gave the attributes of pragmatism an obvious distinctly social meaning by applying them to education. In his hand, pragmatism attained a new dimension as an instrument of social transformation which he called instrumentalism. To him, pragmatism was not a philosopher’s philosophy, something recondite to be debated upon, discussed in seminars or scholarly journals. Related to action by its very nature, it was to be put to use to help people “create personal

plans of action that would help them solve problems and transform their personal and social situations” (Miller 1988, pp.58-59). To him, educational process had no other end beyond itself; it is its own aim, and instrumentalist education, thus defined, entails a purposeful attempt to transform the environment.

Miller (1988) considers Dewey and other pragmatists as ‘prospectors’, and in beliefs and ideals they were against the status quo; in matters of education, they fostered the same forward-looking outlook. To them, the role of education, in its “pragmatic or instrumentalist” sense, “came to be that of training people to transform themselves and their society to meet the future” (ibid, p. 64). They considered life and the aim of education integrated, and they were not simply endeavouring to achieve familiarity with mere ‘ideas’ or master “verbal facility to be exhibited by giving proper definitions or correct answers to test questions” (ibid, p. 82).

To summarize, Dewey’s instrumentalist philosophy considers education a continuous or goal-directed process that targets growth and prepares students for their future on the basis of their understanding of the present. It adopts an experience-oriented curriculum whose main thrust is on solving problems at individual level with far-reaching ramifications on the wider community and its varied functionalities; also, it attains social objectives such as solving problems of social importance and the growth of democracy through the elevation of individual perfection or development.

#### **5.7.4 Instrumentalist approach to general education at work at the General College, University of Minnesota: a case history**

Opened in 1932, the General College, University of Minnesota, adopted many of the general education assumptions popularized by Dewey and others. However, the greater emphasis was on Dewey’s instrumental approach – social egalitarianism, social transformation through the propagation of democratic ideals, freedom of opportunity, educational equality – that suited its own philosophy and orientation as a land-grant state university whose avowed mission is equality of educational opportunity through improved access to higher education of the underprivileged.

Louis D Coffman, then president of Minnesota and the prime architect behind the General College, was a vocal advocate of educational egalitarianism. He took keen interest in the less talented students who thronged the higher education institutions following tremendous success in public schooling during the early decades of the last century. He was of the view that state universities were designed to cater to the needs of the students whose higher education ambitions could not be met in prestigious institutions and as such it was Minnesota's moral responsibility to accommodate those students' educational needs and goals.

The first Dean of the College, Malcolm S MacLean, took up its founding objectives – in addition to egalitarianism and fairness – as social mission. He did not consider the college dropouts or the remnants of school graduates who could not fit into higher education proper as the waste products of higher education. Rather he wanted to turn them into raw materials that could become valuable by-products. In line with his social mission, he called his curriculum 'socialized general education' meant "to fill a present social need, to keep pace with social change, and perhaps ... to help breed and accelerate change for better" (MacLean, cited in Miller 1988, p. 100). In addition to being interdisciplinary, an antidote to overspecialization, the course was instrumentalist. It was based on students' overall personal and social goals, abilities, and needs.

The course's evaluation and assessment system, in addition to testing discipline-based knowledge, consisted of "situations to be analyzed, problems to be solved which the students have never met before ... for this the problems or situations newly confronting society from day to day offer valid sources" (Miller 1988, p. 101)). As well as it evaluated students' attitude rather than understanding. Besides, the course heavily relied on student counselling in order to understand their overall personal and social goals and abilities so that the course could be structured on the basis of students' needs. As the course was experimental in nature, after five years' of its functioning the following profile about student activities emerged: "Most of these young people possess neither the types of abstract intelligence, the special scholastic aptitudes, nor the patterns of interests to permit them to embark successfully on the usual liberal arts program" (ibid).

The above survey profile offered a new perspective on the students' intellectual stature and what they really wanted to gain from a general education course. Such insights helped reorganize the curriculum that incorporated significant changes through the creation of

“four core courses dealing with basic life relationships: vocational orientation, individual orientation, family orientation, family-life orientation, and socio-economic orientation. ... The goal was to acquaint the student with major problems in different areas of life” (Miller 1988, p. 103).

As obvious, the reorganized curriculum oriented itself more towards instrumentalist education with its basic social role as well as its objective to help individual student adapt to society. As for example, the ‘Individual Orientation’ program, consisting of three modules – The Basis of Self-Understanding, Sociability and Recreation and Philosophy of Life – aimed at developing in students a “realistic understanding of themselves in relation to other people and to the world in which they live” so that they could adjust themselves with real life situation involving those relationships (ibid, p. 102). Of these three modules, the ‘philosophy of Life’ segment was structured “around a series of philosophic problems, with specific situations presented to the class for discussion (ibid).

The program, ‘Socio-Civic Orientation’ consisting of two segments, put stress on the interrelatedness of modern society as well as “stressed social dynamics, used problem-solving techniques, and used contemporary issues as the frame of reference” (ibid). The first segment, ‘Contemporary Society’, emphasised the analysis of important socio-economic factors at work in contemporary American society, the primary stress being on American business. In addition, it dealt with pressing issues of modern society in relation to politics, economics, and social problems. Run over two consecutive quarters, this course related “larger problems of society not only to experiences and interests of students, but to their community manifestations as well” (ibid, p. 103). The second course of this program, ‘Current History’, had obvious orientation towards instrumentalism. It aimed at understanding and analysing past events and future developments in the light of the current ones. A weekly news magazine, no prescribed books, was the required text.

Home-Life Orientation, the final orientation course, had three components – the Home in Present Society, Maintenance Aspects of Home Life, Human Relationships and Family Life. Designed on the basis of data that came out of student counselling, this last orientation course dealt with problems students faced in family-relationship situations. Its first component concentrated on family values which people want out of life, the consequence of changes in society on home life and how society is influenced by family life. The second component “looked at issues of family spending, setting goals, and so

forth” while the third course explored “the individual’s relationships with family and friends and with marriage and child rearing” (Miller 1988, p. 103). Assessment of the course was done through discussion as well as through a project that dealt with the family life and relationship of a person the student is familiar with.

Notably, a similar interdisciplinary general education program, the objective being a problem-solving, was in offer at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell (1991-1997); offered in clusters it included such problem-oriented courses as Gender, Global Relations, Peace and Conflict and Technology, Society and Values. The themes of most clusters consisted of key issues facing students in the wider world (MacDougall 2000, p. 242). The program’s problem orientation was evident in the way the Peace, Conflict and Technology unit was designed to include, along with violent wars such as the Middle-East conflict, tensions in homes, communities, and so on.

### **5.7.5 Commentary**

The humanities can greatly benefit from the general education paradigm which is interdisciplinary as well as aligned towards problem-solving. Obviously, the humanities disciplines because of their abstract nature cannot always remain competitive in tangible mundane terms; however, they can significantly enhance their tangible value by adopting the attributes of general education, especially its emphasis on problem-solution. The means-end connection that shapes its curriculum strategies puts greater emphasis on students’ problem-solving ability than on the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge per se. Therefore, as a curriculum movement, the general education paradigm can offer important insight into curriculum innovation and refurbishment which the humanities can utilise to their advantage.

In general education paradigm, the term ‘interdisciplinary’ bears a special import. Here interdisciplinarity does not mean simply studying or surveying two disparate subjects together; it means studying disciplines that are brought together in a healthy collaborative way so that the disciplinary characteristics of these fields mingle together targeting any particular problem solution through a newer configuration. Through such a reconfiguration, the unity of means and ends as well as methods and objectives is targeted so that the ultimate objectives of real life application of knowledge and problem-solution are achieved.

Pitted against the liberal education paradigm that emphasizes an educational philosophy of getting students trained in intangible or abstract ideas or transmitting culture, general education, through a transdisciplinary approach, aims at creating in them attributes such as general intelligence, life skills, attitudes. Although such attributes look abstract outwardly, they have the potential to equip and prepare students with the required strategies such as 'self-direction' for an intelligent and successful living in any complex socio-economic situations. The principal objectives of general education are not to produce a class of scholars or intelligentsia; it is the education of students with mediocre intellectual ability who need desirable skills in relation to their existential needs. Courses such as history and philosophy are offered so that students can get insight into how people in the past lived their life amid a myriad of problems and how they dealt with them as intelligently as possible to make do with their existence. In other words, such subjects mainly provide the context to study and deal with human existential situations.

The general education paradigm is student centric, and the theories of pragmatism and instrumentalism mainly characterise its curriculum organization. These theories attempt to relate education to purposeful objectives; knowledge is created within a social ambit in keeping with the latter's socio-economic and cultural needs. As a social entity it helps shape and transform society by turning its people into active and useful citizens. In this regard, the purpose of education is not to master mere ideas or facts. Progressive and forward-looking in nature, it targets higher ideals through which individual welfare as well as transformation in one's environment is attained.

Also, linked to and based on Dewey's instrumentalist philosophy, general education program is inspired by social egalitarianism, social transformation through propagation of democratic ideals, freedom of opportunity, educational equality. Not in theory, but in actual practice, its curricular objectives suit students who are less talented and from low socio-economic background and whose educational needs no country can ignore morally and socially. The General Education College curriculum at the University of Minnesota, moulded on such ideals and objectives, serves as an example of how mediocre students' educational needs are catered to. Its founding curricular ideals, as summarized here, correspond to its general education objectives: the general education curriculum targets multitudes of students whose educational needs are not met in the university; such a curriculum is revamped as per needs of the students who are less likely to succeed under

the curriculum and pedagogical practices considered highly respectable with respect to educational objectives and intellectual rigours; curricular objectives do not target transmission of abstract or esoteric knowledge; they aim at familiarizing students with their surroundings which they need to manipulate to survive; and it helps students come face to face with the realities upon whose adroit handling and sensible judgment their very success or failure in life depends.

The social mission of the general education paradigm, in addition to targeting higher education for the larger multitudes, aims at ensuring social cohesion through maintaining an educational equilibrium in society. If the vast majority of high school or higher secondary graduates are considered mere waste products or remnants of the intellectual world, social dislocation may occur or the intellectual ecology may lose its balance, thus causing social hiatus as well as repercussions. The general education paradigm, with a specially designed curriculum called socialized general education curriculum, may educate the maximum number of educated citizens so that any social discontents that may lead to disastrous social dislocation may be averted.

Minnesota's testing method consisting of five segments looks realistic and scientific. It targets, along with a basic background knowledge of the disciplines studied, problem solving exercises. The fact that it tests students' attitudes rather than intellectual level gives it a more pragmatic orientation. Students with weaker intellectual calibre may use their particular life attitudes to cope with the realities of life. The survey conducted on the students of the General Education College confirms that such students are not good at abstract intelligence or do not possess appropriate scholastic aptitudes for serious intellectual pursuit. Such findings justify the assertion that dealing with such students requires special testing as well as curricular and pedagogical arrangements.

The curriculum reorganization the General College underwent following the survey mentioned above bears enough evidence to influence curriculum design in general and humanities education in particular. The four core courses – vocational orientation, individual orientation, family orientation, family-life orientation, and socio-economic orientation – receive curriculum justification from their focus on solving practical problems which students face in their own lives. While pure disciplinary knowledge is not ignored altogether, curricular activities mainly deal with issues that do not require more abstract intellect. The targeted skills mainly emanate from everyday contingencies which

students find easy to manipulate or deal with. Through such an intermixture of course requirements derived from disciplinary fields and practical life, three vital objectives are achieved simultaneously: students get acquainted with disciplinary knowledge that is on a par with their intellectual ability; they attain practical problem-solving skills related to their everyday life; and students normally considered useless wastes or remnants get higher education in greater numbers. Notably, the last attribute may help strike a balance between egalitarianism in higher education through equality of opportunity and elitism that purportedly restricts higher education.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

As already envisaged, the relevance of humanities education, especially in a developing country such as Bangladesh, considerably depends on reforming the education system on the basis of empirically driven research findings as well as on pragmatic policy planning. This Chapter has brought to the fore a number of skills, both tangible and intangible, which we can use to make the humanities disciplines relevant. As well as some of the skills have been tested and proven efficacious in real life settings. The general education paradigm, although neglected mainly because of its presumed lack of intellectual depth and rigours, may be beneficial to improving the relevance of the humanities. Also, this Chapter gives us a proper insight into how the knowledge economy paradigm can be exploited to the benefit of the humanistic disciplines. As well as particularly noteworthy is the mechanism to give knowledge a humane orientation through an admixture of humanitarian elements with professional skills. In addition, such prescriptions as reducing the theory-practice chasm through disciplinary convergence as well as minimising the gap between cognitive and operational skills which can really bring the predominantly theory-based humanities disciplines closer to the world of work that calls for tangible skills. The thesis, in its further attempts to bring the humanities even much closer to the needs of the job market, will explore what direct relation these theory-oriented fields may establish with the world of work. The next Chapter entitled ‘Humanities and Employability’ will explore this linkage in more detail.

# Chapter 6

## Humanities and Employability

Although the issue of relevance of higher education can be looked at from different perspectives, getting employed after graduation is a major objective of higher education students. In the UK, for example, the majority of students' (57%) motivation to undertake higher education is to improve their chances of getting a job (Allan 2006, p. 1). Even when there is an oversupply of graduates in the employment market, university education can greatly boost the prospects of employment along with good earnings. However, the relationship between employment and higher education is not that smooth and straight-cut. While vocation oriented courses have ready employability, in the case of the humanities the relationship between "the area of study and employment" is very tenuous or "less direct" (Allan 2006, p. 13). Boys (1992; also, Lyon 1992) attributes the complex relationship between employment and higher education to a number of variables such as the economic situation of the country concerned, employers' preference and expectations, the graduate's ambition and aspirations, her/his personal and intellectual attributes and above all educational factors. The last variable is further influenced by the field of studies, institutions attended, nature of the course attended, grades achieved and of them the most influential factor is the subject studied. In this Chapter I will selectively deal with such pertinent issues as employers' expectations, the challenges the humanities graduates confront in the employment market, overall employment trends, trends specific to the humanities, and improving the employability of humanities graduates.

### 6.1 Employers' expectations

Employers are more interested in general 'transferable' rather than specific vocational skills (Lyon 1992); over fifty per cent employers in Britain do not specify subject areas and prefer general abilities (Allan 2006, p. 1). Relying on research on the alleged 'mismatch' between what skills employers need and the educational qualifications of graduates, Lyon (1992) points out that there is an increased employer demand for general skills which the current degree qualifications are unable to provide. She identifies skills employers look for in prospective graduate employees, some of which are technical ability demonstrated through numeracy and computer application, intellectual excellence, communication, team

performance, problem analysis and solution, achievement and adaptability, capability to generate initiative, action and leadership. These enabling skills are thought to help graduates develop ideas as well as apply them to practical effect. Such skills are specifically required to be developed in graduates whose courses are not geared to labour market needs and who are “unable to sell specialist vocational skills in demand in the labor market”; they are “especially in need of a better range of general skills indicating flexibility and capacity to learn and change in work situations demanding Jacks ... of all trades” (Lyon 1992, p. 136)

According to a British survey, employers tend to emphasise “different qualities in graduates from different subjects” (Boys 1992, p. 117), and they especially attach importance to high ability, ability to learn quickly, relevant knowledge, ability to communicate, and numeracy. The first two skills are regarded as more important by most employers. The high ability as a skill is considered to be present in graduates with better examination grades. In recruiting science graduates employers emphasize relevant knowledge although it is not preferred in arts graduates.

Also, employers are keen on content-independent basic attitudes; they prefer graduates who seem to “have been sufficiently disciplined” and who have learned through appropriate research training and rigorous teaching and curricular exercise (OECD 1993, p. 25). In Australia, employers prefer graduates with good honours and research qualifications as such degrees indicate “high levels of ability, stamina and an ambition to perform well” (ibid). As well as employers think these graduates are intellectually and morally disciplined and motivated; they are highly ambitious and strive for self-development and self-cultivation, too. Employers often use higher education mainly as a ‘crude’ indicator for qualities – perseverance, intellectual excellence, flexibility, dexterity, willingness and ability to learn by doing, educability – which they think help employees acquire expertise, skills and knowledge valued in professional practice.

## **6.2 Strength, weaknesses, and challenges of humanities graduates in terms of employability**

Boys (1992) points to survey findings that confirm that communication as a skill is considered to be found in arts graduates while they are disadvantaged by lack of adequate numeracy. As to other skills humanities graduates acquire, another study aimed to

“establish if there are subject patterns in the types of skills undergraduates feel ... they have developed in higher education” (Boys 1992, p. 117). Respondents were asked: “To what extent have you improved in any of the following as a result of your experiences in higher education either inside or outside your degree course?” The result was analysed using the following criteria:

Point value: -1 for deterioration; 0 for stability; +1 for marginal improvement; +2 for quite an improvement; +3 for great improvement.

Skills:

1. Thinking

Sub-skills:   Critical thinking  
                  Objective thinking  
                  Original thinking

Score (Mean): History: 1.90; English: 1.72; Economics: 1.67; Business Studies: 1.60; Physics: 1.33; Electrical Engineering: 1.31 (Boys 1992, p.118). The findings as to the superior thinking ability of humanities graduates are quite apparent.

The same survey (Boys 1992, pp. 118-119) identifies further important features about patterns different subject areas reveal in terms of skills. Paired into allied subject areas – English and history (humanities), economics and business studies (subject matters overlapping), physics and electrical engineering, they reveal a pattern that helps identify relevant skills. One important feature is that history and English fare relatively well in “many of the groups of skills identified” which include those skills and qualities more readily associated with academic study (critical thinking and understanding concepts related to the subject, for example). History and English are not that different in terms of acquisition of academic skills that may be associated with high ability. English and history, along with business studies and economics, score highly in communication skills. Personal or interpersonal skills highly valued by employers in the current job market context as ‘core’ skills along with communication skills are clearly attributed to business studies, and this academic attributes the development of personal and interpersonal skills in business studies graduates to introduction of business skills in their courses and their conscious teaching as part of deliberate curriculum refurbishment in recent years (Boys 1992, p. 120).

Ball (1992), who taught humanities at Oxford, relates his own experience of learning or teaching these personal and transferable skills which humanities courses are good at imparting: “ ... how does my own humanities course match up to that challenge? Communication skills – yes, I could defend it very well. Team-work – very poor, we don’t teach team-work when we are teaching English at the University of Oxford, but why don’t we? We should do something about it. Problem-solving, yes, not bad. Numerical and statistical methods – again a minus. Sense of values – alpha, that is of course is what the humanities are all about?” (Ball 1992, p.172).

Researchers consider humanities degrees useful in the light of employer demands for flexibility, intellectual resourcefulness, and so on. Lyon (1992) refers to the personal skills and qualities humanities education is able to equip its graduates with and identifies three skills areas – writing, speaking, and interpersonal skills – considered under the rubric of communications skills. As she (Lyon 1992, p. 137) puts it, “The interpersonal skills enabling one to communicate successfully with the widest possible range of people are well fostered in humanities students in their knowledge of literature and history, and through the emphatic imaginative effort required in reading and listening.” Such personal skills developed through humanities courses are of “great relevance to the world of work as well as to culture and society at large,” and these attributes have been implicitly present at the heart of humanities knowledge since the time of Socrates (ibid).

Ball (1992) attempts to judge the strength of a humanities degree against three criteria, and these are (a) a course must be attractive to students and if it is not so it will die soon; (b) it must be academically rigorous and (c) it must be enabling. According to him, all humanities courses should be ‘enabling’ so that students who come to study them for better jobs or vocational fulfilment can find suitable employment. To him, a BA degree does not mean Bachelor of Arts; it “means the capacity for independent judgment in complex matters, the capability of independent learning and suitability for positions of responsibility in leadership” (Ball 1992, pp. 172-173). Notably, the last point is corroborated by the Council for Industry and Higher Education in Britain which finds that many humanities graduates have been able to build most successful leadership careers at various levels of the public and private sector employment (Lyon 1992, p. 140).

The OECD (1991) charts the employment route of the humanities and foresees how in the changed economic context these disciplines, alongside the manufacturing and service sectors, will enjoy brighter employment prospects. Managing the burgeoning service sector mainly dealing with human factors requires, instead of 'dead' raw materials as in the case of manufacturing, different knowledge, expertise and management capability which is dynamic and needs a more professional and sophisticated handling and approach. This sector is increasingly dependent on the employees' sophisticated communication skills that require knowledge of foreign languages as well as different other communication forms that transcend formal language. Undeniably, in many cases technology cannot be a substitute for face-to-face communication. Therefore, the skills implied by such functions are mainly provided by the social sciences and the humanities. Even in the manufacturing sectors nowadays managerial, marketing, administrative, clientele relationship and need assessment and communicational impacts have assumed greater importance. Designing products creatively, preparing instructional manuals with cultural-linguistic understanding and sensitivity, understanding customers' psychology, creative advertisement for product promotion require knowledge and expertise which the social sciences and the humanities can provide. The same OECD document identifies the need for linguists, psychologists, economists, legal experts, cultural specialists in manufacturing industries.

Employers put a premium, along with such other skills as computer and information literacy, on numeracy skills (Allan 2006, p. 5). However, English and history graduates are reported to be deficient in numeracy, and this is one reason employers, most of whom favour graduates with numeracy skills, are reluctant to employ them in jobs that require manipulating facts and figures. This is corroborated by a Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE, Britain) publication on the humanities that categorically states that companies recruiting large numbers of graduates reject candidates for management jobs as they think graduates with poor numeracy are unable to handle quantitative data. In reality, managers need to be very good and accurate at reasoning as well as sifting information from figures and numbers (Boys 1992, p. 121). Ostensibly, by excusing their students from workable numeracy, the humanists are pushing them to a precarious situation.

It is not expected that humanities students will have broader training in numeracy as they are less likely to have done higher mathematics in high schools. But in retrospect in the UK, students of the 1982 and 1985 cohorts admitted that they had not had proper training during their course and would like to have trained in numeracy and computer skills. Also,

Lyon (1992) complains about a lack of curriculum reforms to make humanities graduates employable in different vocations. Complaints are justified when humanities graduates say that their course curriculums are not geared to make them employable. As she (Lyon 1992, p. 135) points out, “Whatever their background characteristics and vocational orientations, humanities graduates feel that they have had a difficult time entering the labour market, and that their chosen course of study did not help them very much in the process. Almost half the graduates of the 1982 and 1985 cohorts had complained of having difficulty getting jobs. This naturally raises doubts as to the relevance of their curriculums to the job-market requirements.”

Complaints are rife that humanities students feel they did not get properly “prepared ... for the world of work by their higher education” (Allan 2006, p. 13). In the UK, two surveys conducted in the 1980s show different student perceptions as to the worth of education and skills humanities graduates achieve. There were many who complained that the general and personal skills they attained were not quite enough to make them employable in the job market. Besides, there is evidence to prove that skills training through any ‘happy coincidence’ is not always effective, and particular social and personal skills cannot be learnt as a sheer by-product of good teaching. They require conscious teaching through incorporation into undergraduate curriculums, and this is more true of numeracy which is “the one ability that least fits the pattern of a ‘general ability’ improved across the board” (Lyon 1992, p. 139).

Lyon (1992, p. 123) explores further the tenuous relationship between humanities graduates and their employment prospects and concludes that the humanities disciplines are not “sufficiently responsive to employers and the labour market.” She points to the open-endedness of the humanities courses in terms of their objectives as well as their graduates’ job preparation, which in turn hinders smooth transition from study to work (Lyon 1992, p. 123; also, Lynton 1993). Research carried on humanities graduates in the UK and Australia confirms this view. In the UK, information gleaned from Early Destinations Statistics shows that humanities graduates without clear-cut employment or occupational objectives take longer time or experience frequent job changes before they can settle into any secured occupation (Lyon 1992, p. 130; also Lynton 1993). Marginson (1993) corroborates the same view and points out that in Australia humanities graduates, along with many other generalist disciplines, suffer higher unemployment after graduation. However, reduced labour market demand has partially to blame for such a belated

transition from education to work.

### **6.3 General trends**

Rylance and Simons (2001) express serious reservations as to the worth of disciplinary knowledge in terms of its immediate utilitarian value that “misrepresents the real relations between employment and subject of study” (Rylance & Simons 2001, p. 73). As to the misrepresentation about the employability of humanities graduates, these researchers draw attention to relevant data collected in the UK and the USA that show that the humanities graduates, compared with graduates from business studies or physical sciences, are hardly disadvantaged in gaining employment. As well as perfect or optimum fit between educational experience or preparation and job-market needs or occupational achievement is not always attainable, and such expectations are “based on a linear conception between supply and demand” (Weert 1996, p. 28). Such a model seems to overlook the crucial fact that “disciplines in higher education may have various connections to job markets with different degrees of directness and specificity” (ibid). Rylance and Simons (2001, p. 75) further think attempts to prove the correlation between subjects studied and employment prospects are often elusive. As for example, in the UK, only 31 per cent chemistry graduates go to jobs related to their field of studies and about 50 per cent Surveying graduates each year “enter the profession for which they were ostensibly trained”, a fact that shows a “marginal correlation, across any graduate cohort ... between subject of study and career route” (Rylance & Simons 2001, p. 75). Such statistics show how unjustifiably the humanities disciplines are blamed for not being able to be career specific. In actuality, “societies are simply not very good at matching supply to demand in terms of training and employment” (ibid).

Also, most jobs do not require specific or particular technical or specialist expertise; employability rather depends more on attitudes or aptitudes than on “definite technical or specialist expertise” or knowledge which “often, on leaving university, [is] out of date” (ibid). Such attributes as “[a]ptitudes ... the ability to learn and adapt speedily, the staying power, confidence and commitment to see things through” are highly valued. And it would be unwise for pure ‘vocationalism’ to “claim a monopoly on such ‘transferable’ skills. They are the province of all higher education ... ” (ibid, pp. 75-76). As well as making employment choice compulsory does not fit well with personal freedom and democratic values as well as interferes with “efficiency. The need for initiative, energy, drive and

purpose are attributes closely related to the exercise of free choice within plural possibilities” (Rylance & Simons 2001, p. 76).

Researchers at Brunel University, UK, define ‘responsiveness’ as “some attempt to actively interpret the needs of employment and to test and advance the curriculum, and the modes of its transmission, accordingly” (cited in Weert 1996, p. 28). Responsiveness can also be analysed on the basis of two opposing models – the internalist, discipline-led model which mainly relates to academic knowledge and training and is not that much susceptible to employment pressures; the externalist market model whose academic objectives are determined by the labour market. Accordingly, responsiveness does not solely mean responding to external factors dominated by employment considerations that call for direct correspondence between educational experience and occupational needs which is not realistically achievable. As for example, although some disciplines such as economics and physics show little responsiveness to external forces or professional practice, their pure “epistemic considerations” are enough to make them successful in the employment market (Weert 1996, p. 28). And this necessitates going “beyond a one-to-one relationship between higher education and employment” as well as becoming “more specific about the ways in which curricula, the content of courses, graduates and their intentions, and employers all interrelate” (ibid, pp. 28-29).

The employability of disciplinary courses depends on whether they belong to the category of extreme degree of ‘closure’ such as medicine or to open market and non-relevant education into which category humanities disciplines fall. In case of the latter, while they possess attributes that are of value to employers, their curriculum is not consciously geared to meet job market needs. Due to expansion as a result of open admission policy as well as lack of job-specific curriculum orientation, graduates of these disciplines compete for jobs in the open market that requires of the graduates to demonstrate attributes in addition to discipline specific knowledge. Such a situation pushes the humanities graduates to a scenario where they face stiff competition from other adjacent disciplines in the open market. In many cases, they may have to vie with those who supposedly have better prospects in the job market. This diminishes their chances of employment as graduates of other disciplines are able to compete with them on better terms whereas humanities graduates are not well-equipped to seek alternative outlets of employment through exploration of possibilities in other fields such as business and administration (Weert 1996, p. 30; also, Lynton, 1993).

Higher education should be concerned with employability which is basically the ability to get employed (Finn 2000). Kruss (2004), in assessing the question of employment and employability, thinks the belief that in the current global context higher education should strive to bring about full employment does not always augur well. Instead, higher education should strive to increase employability of graduates. This researcher explores the case of responsiveness within a new frame of reference that calls for aiming at education and training so that graduates become fully 'employable' as full employment cannot be guaranteed. She attempts to bring to the fore an important distinction between employment and employability: the former targets skills that are specifically linked to occupations and tangible economic activities while the latter stresses on building skills so that a highly educated workforce with an ability to be flexible in terms of skills patterns as well as occupational mobility is created. In other words, "employability is a set of skills, understandings and personal attributes that make a graduate more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations ..." (Allan 2006, p. 5; also, Knight & Yorke 2003, p. 9).

And how far is employability higher education's sole responsibility? Knight & Yorke (2003, p. 18) refer to employability as "wishful thinking masquerading as a concept." They are 'sceptical' about university's ability to make students employable as other factors such as the state of the economy or economic climate, gender, socio-economic background of jobseekers, ethnicity, demand-supply factors, geographical locations, other prevailing circumstances which are beyond the control of individual jobseekers influence negatively the former's efforts to create employment (Knight & Yorke, 2003). This means employability may not lead to employment (Allan 2006, p. 5); employability may enhance the chances of employment; it does not necessarily lead to employment (Knight & Yorke 2003, P 10). As well as the university itself is constrained by limitations: "Learning and learning how to learn in the context of disciplinary study in HE certainly seems a long way distant from learning and learning how to learn in many work contexts. ... This may mean that there is a limit to the extent to which traditional academic study skills can be effectively used in employment and, conversely, a limit to which the generic process skills of employment can usefully be embedded in the traditional curriculum" (Atkins 1999; cited in Knight & Yorke 2003, p. 18).

There are criticisms, typical though, against subjecting higher education to fulfilling employment imperatives. Honeymoon (2000, cited in Knight & Yorke 2003, p. 19) considers such an exercise to develop skills antagonising higher education's noble ideals, wisdom and academic values; or an outside imposition or unwelcome addition. Similar concerns are sounded by Tecichler (2000, cited in Knight & Yorke 2003, p. 19) who thinks that in the name of employability "intellectual enhancement for all and equality of opportunity is being forfeited to presumed industrial demands;" chances are that higher education will become subservient to immediate utilitarian purposes or vocational skills, thus relegating other ennobling functions such as critical thinking. Also, higher education might lose its multiplicity of aims and objectives. And attaching too much importance to employability does a big disservice to higher education by blaming the victim as the blame for unemployment is shifted to higher education and its propagators from employers and economic mismanagement.

Despite such negative views about employability, the crunch of the question is that teachers and educators in the higher education sector cannot ignore employability as a major factor; they must change their high-brow mentality and see a concern for employability as a benign one. Knight and Yorke (2003, p. 34) seem to look at the issue in a positive way when they say that students' employability and the role of higher education are closely related: "... pedagogies for employability are congruent with those for good learning in most, probably all, subject areas;" also, "a concern for employability aligns with a concern for academic values and the promotion of good learning" (Knight & Yorke 2003, P. 1). In fact, enhancing employability calls for a correspondence between setting higher education goals and achieving them through "the design of academic programmes ... It is a complicated and ambitious approach to a complex and ambitious goal, for enhancing employability implies enhancing the quality of learning, teaching and assessment" (ibid, p. 2).

## **6.4 Trends specific to the humanities**

In fact, to make the humanities graduates employable, changes to other aspects, other than the skills-education nexus, are inevitable. They are worse off in the job market because of their different career aspirations as well as different attitudes towards employment. They enter their courses without any proper or well-thought-out career plan or decision. Also, they do little during their studies to improve their job prospects (Boys 1992, p.122; also, Lyon 1992, p. 125). This is quite contrary to electrical engineering and business studies

undergraduates who have more transparent views about the career they want to take up. Besides, as Boys (1992) further points out, humanities undergraduates are less serious about the extrinsic values of their degrees – good pay, good fringe benefits, leadership aspiration, taking jobs that entail assuming responsibility – than economics, business studies and engineering undergraduates. Rather they would prefer altruistic rewards such as helping others and improving society.

However, it does not mean that the humanities graduates do not want highly paid jobs. They simply have different aspirations in which job orientation does not often rank the highest. In this regard, Lyon (1992, p. 125) isolates three out of different career orientation types, and they are ‘careerist’, “inner-directed” and ‘altruistic’ work orientations. Graduates in vocational fields are considered most careerist while “the least ‘careerist’ are graduates in fine art, environmental science, English literature and humanities” (ibid). Quite naturally, the creativity oriented art and design courses followed by the humanities prominently figure in the second category. “Opportunity to help others”, “potential for improving society” and “opportunity to work with people” are the attributes that coincide with altruistic orientation and the subjects that go well with this orientation are nursing, pharmacy, psychology and the humanities (ibid). Lyon regards this as a pattern that establishes a relationship between students’ “aspirations and subject studied”, which in turn explains “differential patterns of entry to the labour market” (ibid).

Different OECD-country reports compiled by Lynton (1993) blame low student motivation, lack of professional orientation, and substantial mismatches between student expectation and program content and goals for low employment of humanities graduates. The humanities students fail to notice a clear association between their career expectations that attract them to their chosen fields and the course contents that are wide off the mark. As for example, many students enrol for modern language courses to gain real proficiency in the language in terms of fluency in speaking the language, command of the written language, knowledge of culture. However, in reality the traditional syllabi and educational objectives of the programs clash with students’ instrumental motives or professional expectations that result in unmet objectives. Again, this mismatch mainly occurs as most humanities students do not have clear-cut conscious ideas or objectives of what their courses are going to equip them with. As for example, in Switzerland, “many students in the humanities and social sciences tend to choose their future more by elimination, knowing what they do not want to do, rather than by a positive motivation toward a

specific career. Because of disparate orientations of the degree programs, graduates find it difficult to identify with a given profession” (Lynton 1993, p. 23).

The most important factor that puts the humanities graduates at a disadvantage is their sheer number in the higher education system. This factor contributes to lowering their relative status as well as the screening function of higher education. When higher education is considered a screening device or a crude indicator to select candidates for employment from a vast array of disciplines, humanities graduates do not fare well. Employers use a number of mechanisms to screen out prospective candidates one of which is called differentiated screening, and this is based on the selectivity of course or the rigidity of selection processes adopted by the admitting universities. Such factors along with quality of students enrolled in the courses, contents of courses, composition of enrolment, entrance requirements, and high participation rates affect adversely the labour market position of humanities graduates.

If an academic discipline has any value, intrinsic or extrinsic, it needs to be articulated without any ambiguity. However, “[m]any of the attitudes and unmet expectations of employers as well as students reflect great ambiguity regarding the purposes of the study of H/SS [humanities and social sciences]” (Lynton 1993, p. 28). In other words, there is opacity about exactly what skills students can acquire through the study of these disciplines. As well as there is an increasing disagreement as to what uses knowledge of the humanities and similar non-practical or non-utilitarian disciplines can be put to. This issue has become more problematic at a time when there is a drastic shift in value from intrinsic to extrinsic skills; a concomitant outcome is a shift to the use-value or “functional view of degrees” in which case “the H/SS degrees have a clearly weaker purchasing power than other degrees” (Lynton 1993, p. 26). While the demand for instrumental skills is on the rise, phenomenal expansion of higher education due to massification has weakened the knowledge or skills base of the humanities either in extrinsic or intrinsic term. Also, the demand for instrumental knowledge has redefined the nature of work on the one hand and weakened the traditional work culture that would rely more on intrinsic or generic skills on the other. In the prevailing socio-economic and employment contexts, “... every [OECD] country report indicates that the current status of H/SS programs is, to a greater or lesser extent, problematic” (Lynton 1993, p. 30).

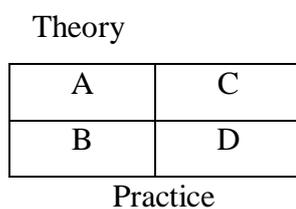
## 6.5 Possible remedies

Developing intrinsic skills alongside content-specific knowledge through conscious changes in curriculums, pedagogical practices, and assessment methods may help improve employability of the humanities. Institutions of higher education primarily aim at awarding degrees in fields that are essentially discipline-based and content specific. When content-specific curriculums are formulated, little attention is paid to students' individual needs and choice. This practice impedes development of job-related generic or process skills. For graduates of non-occupational fields to develop job related skills, a "more independent organization of the course of studies that encourages independent working abilities, creativity, initiative" is required (Lynton 1993, p. 34). Notably, it is not the specialized knowledge but "acquired and developed extra-functional abilities" that make humanities graduates eligible for certain jobs (ibid). This requires styles of teaching and learning different from those traditionally used in professional courses which are mainly lecture-based, didactic, and transmission oriented. Development of process skills is also contingent upon adopting more appropriate examination and assessment system; alongside teaching styles, modes of assessment need to be harmonised as explicit institutional objectives in order to facilitate the acquisition of process skills.

Ostensively, there is an increasing chasm between theory and practice as well as between disciplinary knowledge and real-life problems. This gap between theoretical knowledge and occupational practice can be reduced through a curricular arrangement known as 'convergence', which follows three trends or patterns: (i) curriculums are enlarged or broadened to include technical and occupational fields. Courses leading to dual qualifications [as in Japan, students work for two degrees; in Australia, students can simultaneously major in two disciplines/fields], combination of the humanities with technical minor, and inclusion of computer courses may be cited as examples of such changes or innovations; (ii) bridging the theory-practice divide by including practical experience into the curriculum; (iii) induction of topic- or problem-focused courses, rather than discipline-based ones (Lynton 1993, p. 13). Because of such integration there has developed in the humanities non-technical occupational programs. The curriculum focus is more on training than on education and the courses that fit such curricular arrangements include professional writing, foreign languages, translating, interpreting, journalism. This has resulted in a move from 'perspectives' to 'competence' that has in turn led to a shift in trend from a primarily discipline-based curricular arrangement to one more problem-

oriented (Lynton 1993, p. 45). Some of the humanities and social sciences courses that incorporate the new approach include medical ethics, technology impact assessment, science policy, engineering applications, and environmental impact.

Weert (1996) explores the amalgamation of curriculum issue in the humanities from disciplinary-convergent and theory-practice perspectives. The disciplinary perspective as opposed from convergent approach refers to the traditional way of arranging and offering courses where disciplinary boundaries and the discipline-based subject-matter knowledge dominate the curriculum. Knowledge and expertise gained through this arrangement have mainly theoretical orientation and there is little direct association between employment needs and the knowledge attained. On the other hand, the convergent model, having a cross-disciplinary approach, can have both a theoretical and practical orientation. At the theoretical level, knowledge has no direct relation with employment needs; however, again through curriculum change or arrangements courses studied in tandem with practical orientation can become employable in the job market. Weert (1996, p. 38) illustrates this curriculum arrangement in the following diagram:



This diagram produces four types of courses:

A represents disciplinary knowledge which is purely theory-based: This mode of knowledge puts greater importance on ‘solid’ academic knowledge or grounding that can help improve graduates’ employment prospects. Knowledge is earned through the traditional scholarly pursuit; history, language and similar courses are the fields that follow such an academic approach.

B represents disciplinary knowledge in its practical orientation: This segment includes disciplines that achieve problem- or practice-orientations. Knowledge is used from different disciplines to bridge the gap between theory and practice and the curriculum content, in most cases, is strongly influenced by occupational practice. Weert (1996) cites as examples language courses as a preparation for the teaching profession or translating job and interdisciplinary courses such as public administration. The current practice of

supplementing courses with 'marketable' options, such as language and management, falls into this category as long as the language remains the dominant disciplinary focus.

C stands for convergent knowledge in its theoretical aspect: Here courses and their disciplinary boundaries are loosely defined and this arrangement contains courses which offer a broad range of knowledge and experience so that students' employment opportunities are extended across a wider spectrum. Courses such as liberal arts and cultural studies with theoretical and intellectual focus fall under this category.

D stands for convergent knowledge in its practical form: This segment "typifies the current trend to select courses from various disciplines and combine them into a new setting with an explicitly vocational perspective" (Weert 1996, p. 39). Area studies such as Russian, Japanese or Middle Eastern studies or problem-oriented courses, as for example, environmental studies fit into this category. Language proficiency from the cultural and business perspectives with practical implications forms the core of this segment. Arts courses such as fine arts, theatre, music are combined with business management, economics to form problem-oriented courses such as arts management.

Weert refers to the important differences between segments B and D, both of which have practical orientation and aim to improve job prospects of humanities graduates: the overall difference is that "courses in B are founded on a handful of basic and related disciplines, more so than those in C where parts of disciplines are more loosely connected. Courses in B are subject to greater pressure to develop an integrated perspective and consequently to establish distinctive institutional units than in D where courses are not taught in relation to each other to such an extent" (ibid).

Also, the theory-practice chasm can be reduced through conscious curriculum arrangements. One way, as practiced, for example, in the USA, is by making the graduate level education more profession-focused. Besides, the undergraduate courses may have theory-application/practice curriculum arrangements; as in the case of Sweden, the initial curriculum at undergraduate level, marked by its breadth, progresses towards specialization with a shift on emphasis from theory to application and practice (Lynton 1993, p. 12). The first year of a three-year undergraduate course is broader and foundational in nature; the second year allows specialization while in the third year there is a choice between advanced theoretical studies or a combination of work experience and

project work.

Another effective way to improve job prospect for humanities graduates without well-defined professional orientation is continuing education or further appropriate vocational education and training after graduation. In Britain, postgraduate study is normally vocational in character and “it appears to be successful in preparing graduates for the work they do and assists them in getting it” (Lyon 1992, p. 130). Samples from the 1982 cohort of humanities graduates show that three years after graduation one fourth of all humanities graduates had obtained a graduate certificate in education while a further quarter had gained some sort of vocational qualifications. It is seen that in areas where first degrees have no specific vocational training, further study or training must compensate for the professional deficiencies. The same cohort of graduates shows that only one-third of them found their undergraduate education relevant to any profession. Their qualifications gained through undergraduate studies served as a stepping stone for further studies in a different field to make them employable in the job market. Postgraduate courses for those humanities graduates whose previous studies lacked vocational orientation should add additional labour market significance. This is more true of students who enter higher education through non-standard educational pathways with a less wide educational background. As Lyon (1992, p. 132) aptly argues, in absence of well-defined vocational orientation amongst humanities students as well as given the tenuous connection between undergraduate disciplinary knowledge and employment, it is important that “course developers in humanities ... see vocationally oriented postgraduate courses as the first step for which to prepare their students.”

Knight and Yorke (2003, p. 31) explain how the employability of humanities graduates can be improved through enhancing “practical intelligence” along with “academic intelligence”, (practical intelligence refers to “specific and contexted [sic] knowledge”), and “[c]entral to practical intelligence is tacit knowledge” that makes graduates “more effective in their respective performance domains.” Tacit knowledge acquired mainly through “experience in a particular domain” is “needed to successfully adapt to, or shape real-world environments” (ibid). Tacit knowledge or practical intelligence facilitates expertise that in turn makes problem solving easier. Graduates with significant tacit knowledge are more readily employable; employers think that graduates with tacit knowledge which is ‘contexted’ can undergo smooth transition from the state of being novice to that of the expert. Higher education can help such a transition through conscious

pedagogical strategies such as case studies, role playing, simulation. As well as work experience, internship, voluntary work, work placement can help translate formal academic qualifications into achievements and experience or 'terms' that employers put premium on (Knight & Yorke 2003, P. 16).

However, improving employability through higher education is always, according to Knight and Yorke (2003, P. 17), fraught with danger, uncertainties and complexity, even super-complexity. As well as teaching outcomes that are expected to produce desired employable skills do not always work in a predictable way and at times get affected by constructivism. Such factors preclude ideal coupling between education and skills or between curricular arrangements and teaching outcome, resulting in frequent 'slippages' or aberrations in the employment market. Also, such factors definitely undermine "the assumptions of rational curriculum planning and ... a tight-coupling between teaching, resources, tasks, learning and judgements of achievement" (Knight & Yorke 2003, p. 18). Even the alternative idea that creating opportunities which favour the kinds of learning we intend to eventuate may not result in immediate and measurable outcomes. Thus at best it is "an exercise in loose-coupling" which results in "the creation of learning possibilities by bringing together favourable affordances – teaching, resources, tasks, and judgements of achievement" (ibid).

In fine, to make humanities graduates employable both higher education policy makers and employers need to be realistic as well as reform oriented. On the part of course leaders and policy formulators, there is a need for frequent course assessment as well as "evaluations of what is being offered. With courses in humanities increasingly acting as a 'bridge' for many students between on the one hand their needs and aspirations for an interesting course, a general education, a more worthwhile quality of life and work, and on the other an increasingly skills oriented labour market, then this role has to be acknowledged and a truly general education provided. Forms of constructive compromise have to be found focusing on curricular breadth and changing teaching methods based on the expressed needs and retrospective evaluations of the students themselves" (ibid, 141). The idea of liberal education has to be reformulated so as to include curriculum contents traditionally not viewed within the domain of liberal education. Such reformulation is necessary to accommodate job market needs as well as the needs of the changing student population that includes more mature students as well as students from non-traditional backgrounds. Postgraduate education needs to be seen as preparation for the occupational needs of the

emerging job market. The traditional demand for humanities education should be reconciled with the demand for graduate work in a changing labour market. The real 'parameters' of higher education in terms of its educational as well as job market needs are to be identified; a broader framework for learning "with a well defined concept of an undergraduate curricular generic 'core' needs to be identified" (Knight & Yorke 2003, p. 141).

Employers' onus in this aspect is not to be discounted. The traditional way of looking for the best and the brightest should be changed. To expect that universities and colleges have the sole onus of equipping graduates with all required job skills may not work, and in this regard employers' expectation should be realistic. Besides, the rapid changes in the skills base of graduates in the context of quick technological, social and economic changes cannot so easily be reconciled with the needs of employers and in recruiting graduates they need to take into consideration all these incidental factors. Drawing on graduate labour market trends in the 1990s, Lyon says that "unless recruiters adapt to the changing supply of graduates and graduates attune themselves more to the rules and expectations of the labour market, there is likely to continue to be a growing segmentation in the graduate labour market with a shortage of skilled labour co-existing with graduate unemployment. Herein lies the challenge for both educators and employers of humanities graduates" (ibid).

## **6.6 Commentary and conclusion**

The issue 'higher education and employment' is really complex and dealing with it in a single chapter is nothing but a simplistic exercise. The issue becomes much more daunting when it deals with the humanities that have little direct relevance to the employment market. However, the above deliberation based on available research attempts to clarify to some extent the ambiguity and uncertainties associated with the issue of employment of humanities graduates. While any perfect correspondence between the needs of the job market and the knowledge and skills the humanities minimally equip the students with, there are encouraging signs of at least minimizing the chasm between what the humanities graduates bring to the job market and what their employers' expectations are.

Researchers discover different patterns as to the employment prospects as well as employability of humanities graduates who, compared with graduates from science, technology and business disciplines, are at a disadvantage with respect to their

employability in the job market. However, employers' preference to general skills in their prospective graduate employees puts the humanities in an advantageous situation provided that their course curriculums are geared accordingly. Besides, as employers put less importance on subject-matter knowledge of the humanities graduates, their employment prospects depends to a great extent on knowledge and skills outside their curricular and subject jurisdiction.

The findings that humanities graduates' deficiency in numeracy makes them less competitive in the job market are really convincing, and this very issue needs serious remedial attention. Humanities curriculums should incorporate such courses as can remedy this weakness. Courses that deal with knowledge of basic sciences, use of computers and information technology, general mathematics, elementary statistics and basic accounting may play a vital role in improving numeracy skills. However, humanities graduates' different cognitive and intellectual orientation remains a real stumbling block to preparing them for numeracy skills. Even conscious curriculum reforms, let alone happy coincidence, may not often be able to equip such graduates with numeracy skills.

As different surveys confirm, humanities graduates fare well, along with business and economics graduates, in such skills as communication and critical thinking skills. However, the latter's more developed public relations skills make them more acceptable to employers; and humanities graduates who study business related courses in tandem can increase their employability. As it is known by now that business courses are able to impart these public relations or interpersonal skills to their graduates through conscious curriculum reforms, this same strategy might work for humanities graduates, too.

As evident, in addition to the nature of the courses humanities graduates study, many other factors such as their career aspirations, attitude towards extrinsic gains, lack of career direction, less motivation to assume responsibility influence their strengths and weakness in relation to building career. While intrinsic attributes such as altruism deserves recognition and encouragement, ways and means need to be devised to make them more career conscious and oriented. Career counselling before and during their courses may help correct such drawbacks.

As findings from research conducted in the UK corroborate, disciplines such as the humanities that produce graduates without well-defined career direction can increase their employment prospects through targeted continuing education having vocational orientation. Postgraduate certificates, diplomas, professional masters, teaching qualifications can help them stand in good stead in the job market. Also, conscious curriculum arrangements aimed at reducing the gap between theory and practice appears to be beneficial. Disciplinary convergence between the humanities and skill-based courses from science and technology disciplines, reorienting the humanities on the basis of problem-solution paradigm, as illustrated above, can improve the employment prospect of humanities graduates.

The humanities are able to bring about personal growth and develop transferable skills in students as essential by-products of attaining scholarship. The prescription as to how generic skills can be developed in the humanities students through curriculum innovation seems to bear credence. It is convincing that generic skills can be developed by subsuming them in the disciplines themselves through innovative teaching methodologies that include project work, fieldwork, group activities, seminars, writing assignments.

There are contrary evidences to prove that humanities graduates are not always disadvantaged as far as statistics are concerned. Also, the claim that the relation between subjects studied and their employability is tenuous is supportable. It is not that easy to bring employable skills and the disciplines into a happy coincidence. As research findings indicate, such a mismatch is not related to the humanities only; also, it is a widely accepted fact that employment choice cannot be insulated from other personal and socio-economic factors. At the same time complaints are justified when the undergraduates in the UK say that their curriculums are not geared to the job market needs or they have little relevance to the exigencies of the employment market.

As well as the choice to work or not to work should be treated as a democratic prerogative. By simply tying higher education to employment consideration encroaches on people's personal rights. First of all education should be considered as free choice and then getting employed after education should be left to personal attitudes, endeavours, societal considerations. A British survey conducted by Higher Education Academy corroborates the view that many students go to higher education being motivated by personal choice and interest. Humanities graduates are almost unanimous that they prefer to do humanities disciplines at the university because they "felt they were good at them at school;"

employment choice or motivation is a minor factor (Allan, p. 11). In this regard, the generalist nature of the humanities, according to a respondent, is a boon: "... if you don't want to do law or medicine then you are better off doing a humanities degree which will give you a wider perspective on the world and give you more options" (cited in Allan 2006, p. 12).

However, it is worth looking at the issue 'humanities and employment' somewhat critically. It seems that the above critics are unrealistically preoccupied with the value of intrinsic or generic transferrable skills. How far are they capable enough to increase the employment prospects of humanities graduates in a job market scenario mainly driven by readily translatable tangible technical, technological, scientific and business skills? Although they are important attributes valued by employers, simply relying on intrinsic skills has its pitfalls. Intrinsic skills by themselves are very often insufficient to land graduates of any disciplines in a good job as their performance as professionals is also contingent upon job specific skills and expertise. As well as job skills not common with all the graduates across the board can enhance their competitive edge. Are the humanities graduates in any advantageous situation in terms of specific skills or expertise? By exploring their niches particular to their fields, not simplistically harking on intrinsic skills, the humanists can improve the chances of getting employed in a highly competitive job market. Of course, the humanists cannot be turned into technicians or techno-scientific professionals; humanists are humanists and their worth as humanists needs to be enhanced. In this regard, while the above researchers are all agog with accolades as to the worth of such intrinsic attributes, they seem to be idealistic in promoting the excellence of pure generic skills which are not always discipline specific. However, looking at the issue of employment skills more creatively as well as realistically, the humanists can explore and bring to the fore the skills humanities graduates are particularly endowed with.

Let us look at the issue of employment realistically. Even if the humanists strive to explore their employment opportunities on the basis of their niche areas and expertise, there is a limit to what extent their ability can be extended or stressed. In this case, the humanists are required to be content with what they maximally can achieve given their best efforts and ability. This does not mean that they must embrace honourable poverty and remain content with a life without material gains and expectations. But their expectations should be balanced by their professional limitations as well as ability. One way to compensate for their professional limitations is by increased intellectual elevation and satisfaction.

Intellectual success without accompanying tangible professional achievements is no mean feat. Then, if by choice the humanities graduates aspire to be successful in financially as well as professionally tangible lucrative vocations, they need to know how to sell their skills. Also, as absolute match between desired skills and courses studied cannot be established, employability rather than full employment should be the motto of higher education. And the relevance or responsiveness of higher education should be redefined so that the worth of higher education is not measured simply in terms of economic considerations and job market imperatives. Higher education's moral, intellectual, cultural, and civic roles need to be brought to the fore as well.

Although employment or employability has direct utilitarian connection and the relationship between employment and humanities disciplines is tentative, with due curriculum adjustment and reforms we can improve their relevance to the job market significantly. Given the fact that higher education institutions in different countries have been able to improve the usefulness of higher education through research and appropriate curriculum innovations, we can take clues from such developments and make the humanities disciplines relevant to Bangladesh and its socio-economic and other realities.

It seems to have been established through the above deliberations that the humanities disciplines in the higher education sector have enough relevance in the latter's wider term that includes utilitarian, intellectual, social, cultural, political, moral, ethical and aesthetic dimensions. Although they are at times not able to equip the graduates with readily employable skills, they are not without any value; they are important as well as useful in their own way. As already articulated, they are essential to any society's smooth functioning. Society does not function on economic and pure utilitarian expediencies only; its meaningful and healthy existence is contingent upon varied factors many of which may not have direct tangible or practical uses. Society must depend on the humanities and similar humanistic disciplines and their knowledge and intellectual output in order to ensure an intellectual, moral and cultural equilibrium alongside its economic expediencies. The next Chapter will explore their relevance in Bangladesh context and attempt to demonstrate how the humanities disciplines offered at institutions of higher education in Bangladesh can contribute to its socio-economic and intellectual development.

# Chapter 7

## Improving the Relevance of Humanities in Bangladesh

In this Chapter, the issue of relevance will be applied to Bangladesh context. As part of this exercise humanities education in Bangladesh universities, university colleges, and other tertiary level institutions should be assessed and evaluated in relation to its strengths and weaknesses to ascertain what remedial measures are needed to make it relevant in view of the economic, social, cultural, political, moral, ethical, and intellectual considerations or expediencies. Realistically speaking, it is not possible to cover all the institutions, so I have chosen Dhaka University as a representative institution as it is the oldest and most prestigious university in the country. Besides, it acts as leader in setting academic and curriculum trends which other universities normally follow or replicate as a model. Above all, the general tertiary institutions in Bangladesh adopt and follow almost identical course structure and curriculum patterns. However, I will include the three-year Pass (BA) curriculums of the National University. The Pass BA course of this affiliating university deserves a differential treatment as it is offered only in the affiliated colleges and Pass students come to their courses with different intellectual levels, motivation, and career expectations. Pass students' socio-economic backgrounds are also different as most of them study in colleges located outside the main cities. The four-year Honours and the Masters courses offered at affiliated colleges under the National University will remain outside the purview of my thesis since they follow almost the same patterns of the courses offered at public general universities such as Dhaka University.

### 7.1 Humanities courses at Dhaka University

Currently, the Arts Faculty at Dhaka University consists of 14 departments (see Appendix 1 for a complete listing). In this thesis, I will review the major ones that enrol the bulk of the students.

### **7.1.1 English Literature and Language**

Needless to say, English plays a very important role, both commercially and academically. English language and literature can equip students with varied skills that can be used in different employment situations. The linguistic and literary skills they acquire can be used in teaching, writing, editing, journalism, librarianship, acting, and directing. They can also develop such other skills as the ability to analyse and summarize materials, communicate effectively, to think logically, and along with them the sensitivity to literature and language. All these make them good candidates for a wide range of careers including personnel, administration, management, marketing, computing science, finance, and the media (QAA 2007, Subject Benchmark Statements: English).

English in Bangladesh has a long history, and being a former colony of Britain it inherited English as a legacy of the Raj. In Bangladesh, it is important not only as an academic discipline but also as a symbol of aristocracy and elitism, scholarliness, and social prestige (Banu & Sussex 2001). Although officially and constitutionally Bengali is the national language of Bangladesh, due to its international importance English still occupies a dominant position in the country. In Bangladesh its value is mainly utilitarian or functional and is used as an international link language. It is, unlike in India, not used for interpersonal and inter-institutional communication; and there is no possibility that it will be the lingua franca. However, it has become an integral part of the country's socio-cultural and economic fabrics because of its use for a long time for varied purposes (Banu & Sussex 2001; also, Rahman 2005). As to its importance, English is mainly an area-specific language and used for specific purposes only; its use particularly remains confined to academia. It is learnt for utilitarian reasons such as getting good jobs and building lucrative careers within and outside the country. In this regard, Sen (2008) appears to sound pragmatic when he regrets post-Bangladesh policy decision to exile English from the country as a dominant language in the education system.

The beginning of English in undivided Bengal can be traced back to its commercial importance in the second quarter of 17th century when the British East India Company got trading rights in Bengal and businesses and industries were set up at such places as

Hughli and Balasore. However, with the political domination of the British got rooted firmly, it became the language of administration as well as of academia in the 1830s following “Lord Macaulay’s famous Minute recommending the teaching of western subjects and then with William Bentinck's decision that Indians should be taught through the medium of the English language” (Zaman 2008, np). While Macaulay’s Minute of 1835 paved the way for English to become academically important, Sir Henry Hardinge’s “resolution of 10 October 1844 gave English the formal recognition that in practice it was assuming as a language of economic importance. Hardinge’s resolution advanced the cause of English by making it the passport to higher appointments” (ibid).

English education in East Bengal received further fillip with the founding of Dhaka University in 1921 and English was one of its 12 founding departments. The medium of education except the languages was English. Despite nationalist fervour in favour of Bengali, this trend continued until 1971 along with other universities in the then East Pakistan. Until then college education at tertiary level was mostly imparted in English. Currently, all the general Universities in Bangladesh offer Honours, MA, MPhil, and PhD courses in English Literature and Language (Dutta, 2001); as well as many colleges under the National University offer identical Honours and MA courses in English.

Currently, the English Department at Dhaka University offers a four-year BA (Honours) and one-year MA degrees. The MA is offered in two streams –Literature and Applied Linguistics & ELT (English Language Teaching). In the not-too-distant past “the curriculum adhered to canonical British literature for English literature meant only literature of the British Isles, preferably of England” (Huq 2008). However both the programs at the Department have undergone significant changes having focused on the practical aspects or application of the English language to real life situations or the needs of society. Recent changes are as diverse as to include courses in English language skills (writing, including advanced composition, reading, listening, speaking, structure of English), English for specific purposes, linguistics, English language teaching, incorporation of language learning into literature, language and media, cultural studies. The course entitled Eng (C): Language and Media (optional) gives the Honours course a wider interdisciplinary stature. The addition of the linguistics course (Introduction to Linguistics) is justifiable given the fact that at Masters level many graduates may opt for the linguistics stream. Other non-literary courses such as advertising (offered at the Department of Journalism), film criticism (also offered at the Department of Journalism),

if added, will widen its course offerings and career prospects.

As the above changes indicate, they are meant to make the course, hitherto tilted towards literature, more practical-oriented or to equip students with skills that are in demand in the job market. English literature graduates are easily employable in a country that has an acute shortage of English teachers at all levels of the education system. Their demand has increased manifold in the current globalized world in which Bangladesh needs well-qualified English teachers. With growing emphasis on communicative language teaching that requires specific language teaching skills, literature graduates with no formal language teaching training or orientation fail to perform up to expectations. The course Eng 101: Developing English Language that focuses on the four basic skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing – clearly targets students’ linguistic skills that are needed, alongside their knowledge of literature, to use the language in everyday settings. Enhancing students’ communication skills is also targeted, and its Speaking component that includes such aspects as public speaking, debate and discussion will facilitate communication and other inter-personal skills. The Reading component of the course appears to be designed to incorporate literary elements alongside general reading skills. The former targets “critical reading”, making “judgments about how a text is argued, reflecting and making personal response”, “extensive reading” of books, “reading journal articles and literary criticisms”, (DU Syllabus for English Honours, 2007c) and reviewing books read during the course.

The courses Eng 104 Advanced Composition and Eng 204 Academic Writing have clearer focuses on the practical aspects of English. Learning to write in a real life as well as academic setting is the main thrust of these courses. This particular feature of these courses aims at increasing their relevance in the contemporary job market. Again, alongside such practical considerations, there is an obvious emphasis on “writing literary essays on character, theme, style, plot structure, imagery, symbolism ...” (ibid).

The course Eng 304: English for Professional Purposes is explicitly practical-oriented as the course contents indicate. It includes, among others, such components as business reports, business letters, job applications, internal memoranda, minutes, editing, developing press copies. Such components clearly aim at students’ writing skills they will need in their professional life. English graduates seeking employment outside academia

may benefit from such practical skills as well.

Two courses – Eng 301 Introduction to English Language Teaching and Eng 401 Teaching Second Language Skills – aim at teaching students techniques of teaching English as a second language. The former introduces all the approaches to and methods of English language teaching including Communicative Language Teaching while the latter targets equipping students with the skills of teaching basic skills of English as a second language. As is obvious, the inclusion of these two courses, in addition to contributing to the course's breadth, will prepare students to be good language teachers. Whereas excessive emphasis on literature leaves students poorly prepared for teaching jobs most of the graduates will take up as their main profession, components on teaching methodology will help them perform their teaching responsibilities more skilfully as well as professionally. This will go a long way to mitigate the dearth of qualified English teachers in the country.

The two MAs the Department of English at Dhaka University offers, as already mentioned, are part of its revamped course structure in view of the need of the time. The MA in Literature is purely in line with its traditional academic structure. However, the MA in Applied Linguistics and ELT (English Language Teaching) has a professional as well as practical leaning. Again, the objective is to produce qualified language teachers, and the program includes courses on all the applied issues of linguistics including a major course on language teaching entitled EL 505 English Language Learning and Teaching. The latter deals with all the major issues of English language teaching and learning – syllabus and curriculum design, language testing, teaching methods, teaching basic language skills, and writing lesson plans.

As to how the ELT-related course and its incorporation into the English MA curriculum at Dhaka University can improve students' employability and knowledge of teaching English, Majid (2008) aptly remarks that previously the MA course in English at Dhaka was purely literature based. It would hardly pay any attention to any practical aspects of teaching the language although most MAs chose teaching as a profession. It is quite evident from what the writer, a former student of the English Department at Dhaka University and a holder of MA, speaks about her own experience:

EVEN a few years back any mention of an MA in English meant a Masters degree in English Literature. Schools and colleges everywhere had teachers teaching

English Language with no clue about language teaching, banking only on their instincts and memories of their own school and college days for any success in language teaching. When I first became a language teacher, I was required to write an article related to language teaching but to my chagrin I realized that despite having an MA in English I had no real substantial knowledge of the area at all. Our syllabus in those days at Dhaka University did not incorporate any course related to language (Majid 2008, np).

According to the same author, an MA in ELT is purely a ‘progressional’ degree and prepares students for an instantly employable career in teaching. The students start “getting job offers even before they get to complete their degree. In an era of employment crisis this is a very positive sign indeed! ... those students of ELT who are teachers from schools, colleges and universities, claim to have gained substantial professional development in their field, which is enabling them to move on to better jobs” (ibid).

The fact is that recent changes the English departments in Bangladesh have gone through have been influenced by job market pressure. The syllabi hitherto literature oriented have embraced curricular changes to keep pace with the “reality bite of the job market” (Mortuza 2008, np). Traditional literary courses had to be trimmed to accommodate ‘functional’ courses on business writing and ELT. As this academic informs us, “... English Departments are now producing graduates for the service sectors, while competing with the students from the Business Administration. Of late, we have started producing teachers for the foundation English courses at various private universities” (ibid).

The various reforms the English programs at Dhaka University have gone through seem to have occurred in response to recent curriculum innovation and reform in the field. According to Prof Fakrul Alam (Alam, 2001) of this Department, the English department has undergone considerable curriculum reforms since the mid 1980s. Such curriculum innovations at the department were conceived and ultimately delivered with certain academic and pedagogical objectives in view. The contextual value of literature, students’ inherent interest in literature, literature’s role in language learning, interdisciplinarity, discouraging rote learning to develop creativity in students, making literature student-friendly by avoiding esotericism, and above all market demand received due consideration in the revamped curriculum.

Although the English program at Dhaka has undergone considerable reforms to keep pace with the evolving trends in the field, it has further scope for improvement. I will attempt a comparative study between the English program at Monash University, Australia, and the one at Dhaka University in order to ascertain in what ways Dhaka's program can benefit from Monash's (notably, I have chosen Monash because of my longstanding association with this institution as well as my first-hand knowledge of its academic activities). Although Dhaka's Undergraduate English program is not as wide-ranging as that at Monash, both Monash and Dhaka offer the following identical courses with similar course objectives and practical focus:

Academic Writing (Eng 204 - Academic Writing, Dhaka; ENH1250 - Academic Writing, Monash);

Eng 304: English for Professional Purposes at Dhaka and ENH1260: Professional Writing and ENH2185: Advanced Professional Writing at Monash.

Monash's advanced course on Professional Writing (ENH2185) is more practical oriented and this is outlined in the course synopsis: "This course aims to further develop and refine both the practical and theoretical skills learned in Professional Writing ENH1260" (MU Course Handbook). This is further reinforced by the following elaborations:

On completion, the student will be able to:

- (1) Write a tender/proposal/ submission/ grant document for a competitive bidding/ funding application ...
- (2) Write sound documentation for instructions/ manuals, based on usability criteria
- (3) Write a position paper which coherently presents an organizational standpoint on an issue or policy
- (4) Demonstrate an ability to reinforce the message of a written document with a spoken presentation. (ibid).

As the above course contents indicate, the syllabus of the Department of English at Dhaka University can benefit from the syllabus at Monash by incorporating the course objectives that ostensibly give the course a greater professional orientation demanded of managers and executives at business and such other related government and non-government organizations. Also, it emphasizes spoken presentation skills that can be achieved through conscious curriculum changes such as presenting talks in seminars or in classes. Notably, the syllabus of the above two Dhaka University courses, purely theoretical in nature, simply outline the course contents without specifying how and in what ways the students are going to benefit from them in tangible terms.

That the English curriculum at Monash is more career-oriented and puts greater emphasis on tangible skills is evident from its inclusion of many other courses that are related to writing and similar practical skills. Let us examine what other courses Monash offers in addition to its traditional literary components:

The course ENH2620 - Grammar and Expression at Monash “considers the structure and use of English grammar and the applications of that learning to composition and style” (MU Course Handbook). It aims at linking “theoretical bases to practical expressive techniques” (ibid). As obvious, its course objectives put emphasis on improving language skills along with skills of editing and writing. Understanding the structures of English, explaining the relationship between theoretical models of grammar on the one hand and practical written and verbal expression as well as usage and style problems on the other are some of its course objectives.

ENH2780 - Writing as Social Practice 1 aims at developing students’ writing skills through writing assignments that students will have to undertake as part of their academic works. As part of these writing assignments they will practice “drafting revision and editing in small group sessions. Basic proof-reading symbols and copy-editing skills will be taught over the semester to enhance this process” (ibid). The Course’s emphasis on practical copy-editing skills is noticeable.

The courses ENH2980 - Introduction to Fiction Writing and ENH2981 - Advanced Fiction Writing (also, ENH4265 - Writers and the Creative Process) target putting students’ literary and linguistic skills into practice. Students are required to participate in writing workshops and produce and edit manuscripts for publication. These courses attempt to “integrate reading, writing and editing skills” (MU Course Handbook); students are required to read texts as models for “creative explorations” (ibid); they are to practice writing short stories as part of practical exercise; they need to edit their own as well as edit and critique their colleagues’. Such courses are of use to aspiring creative writers as well as to those who seek to build careers in related areas such as publishing, reviewing and teaching.

Realistically speaking, the English Department at Dhaka University will not be able to attract students to such advanced courses in Creative Writing in English as mentioned above. Non-native students studying English may not be intellectually capable enough to

handle the intellectual rigours of these practical-oriented writing courses. However, an integrated or ‘packaged’ single unit-level course incorporating different aspects of creative writing as well as advanced grammar may be offered and such an integrated course may help develop in the students superior writing skills. As to the popularity of the Creative Writing course in Australia as well as its ability to equip students with life skills, Trounson (2009, np) refers to a survey findings which indicate that all the 38 respondents doing creative writing courses at Melbourne, RMIT and Victoria Universities had admitted themselves to creative writing for “personal development, general written expression skills or skills for careers in writing.” Integrated within English, cultural studies, communications and media, creative writing improves individual expression, writing skills, knowledge of textual production as well as of the workings of the language which in turn help students become consummate writers, critics, editors.

The above curriculum reforms mainly apply to non-literary courses that have been introduced to enhance the relevance of English as a discipline. The pure literary courses can also be reformed to suit the need of the time and market imperatives. One way is to realign teaching of literature to consciously train students to enhance their literacy and linguistic skills. The survey findings at Union College (mentioned earlier on page 109) make it quite obvious that students of literature approach the language with creativity, imagination as well as with their superior skills and ability to manipulate the language. Studying literature enhances their stock of vocabulary, word-power, power of expression as they are required to read authentic texts written by established writers. Pedagogical practice, assessment methods, setting question papers creatively (so that students are to display superior language skills) need appropriate revamping or reorientation; classroom teaching with greater emphasis on language and structure and the way the language and its different facets are negotiated in the texts by their creators may help students master the language efficiently. Children’s literature, literary texts written for adolescent readers may engage non-native students in extensive reading and train them in manipulating the language within their comfort zone. Courses such as Literature and Language Skills or Literature and Creative Use of Language may be introduced. A course on literary journalism with emphasis on book review, film criticism, art criticism as well as a methodological course entitled Incorporating Literature into ESL Teaching and Learning may be introduced with the pedagogical objectives of improving second language through literature.

In Bangladesh, as English is valued mainly in terms of its utility, its expansion on literary line may not be that encouraging. Despite this fact, the new trends that have recently emerged should not be altogether ignored. It can assume interdisciplinary or comparative perspectives through critical theory, cultural studies, film studies, popular culture as well as studying literature through religious, sociological, philosophical approaches. However, in the name of mere expansion students should not be over-burdened with courses that are intellectually too rigorous as well as arcane in nature. The objectives of these courses should be to promote or highlight literature's socio-cultural roles; its contribution to social transformation, to enlighten society and free it from superstition, social orthodoxy may be emphasized.

### **7.1.2 Bengali Literature**

The Bengali Department at Dhaka University dates back to its founding year in 1921. Currently, it offers four-year BA Honours and one-year MA programs by course work. The current Honours program is a literature major and the core courses tilt dominantly towards pure literary subjects or literary history from the ancient to the modern period. The core courses cover all the genres and periods of Bengali literature except Course 306: Phonetics and Linguistics (Historical and Comparative Linguistics). Course 401: Western Literary Theory and Course 406: Literary Classics (in translation) add breadth and variety to the program.

The area courses are made up of English Literature, Political Science, Philosophy, Economics, Sociology, history and Psychology out of which students shall take only two (each course consisting of two papers or units). While the area courses are wide-ranging and have the scope to make the program cross-disciplinary, students' option to choose only two makes it narrow. Another good aspect is the inclusion of English Literature that can increase students' employability; however, the optional nature of the area courses makes it easier for students to skip English.

The MA program in Bengali offers seven core courses while the number of elective courses is 13. Students need to choose two out of 13 elective courses. All the elective courses, except Course 508: Descriptive Linguistics, are literary in character and mainly aim at specialization in the area of study – poetry, drama, novel, short story, or individual authors.

A parallel drawn between Bengali literature and English literature in the latter's native context in England may help us put Bengali literature in Bengal's truer perspective. The questions Knight and Yorke (2004, p. 70) put in the context of English may also be asked in Bengali's context: "How useful is [a] [Bengali] degree in the world of employment? What practical benefits does it bring? ... What is a degree in [Bengali] worth in financial terms?" Given the fact that (as also in the case of English) Bengali has less vocational value, it is very hard to relate its knowledge to the world of employment. And hence employers seem to be genuinely apprehensive about its tangible worth.

As to the employment prospects of Bengali graduates, most of them become teachers at different levels of the education system, the proportion of school or college teachers being the highest. Many with a creative knack pursue career in editing, publishing industries, print and electronic journalism, cultural or creative industries, film and media sectors as script writers while some pursue independent career as writers. There are also prospects for graduates in the advertisement industry.

Bhattacharya (2006, p. 362) makes some pertinent observations about the utility of Bengali literature. Bengali, as he thinks, is yet to build its utilitarian character, and the main objective of studying Bengali still remains academic or intellectual fulfilment. Notably, English, although a foreign language, carries considerable weight in terms of its practical use, and this very fact makes it employable.

Bengali literature has a very tenuous connection with the outside world, and its use mainly remains confined to Bangladesh and West Bengal. While international linkages remain a far cry, even whatever linkages it previously had through such cognate languages as Sanskrit has been lost. The issue of establishing inter-language connection is not easy when Bengali has no practical value in terms of its use for academic, research, official or work-related [mainly in West Bengal's context] purposes. One avenue can be exploited, and it is to use its cultural and creative value. According to Bhattacharya (2006), Bengali folk literature or culture has the potential to popularise Bengali outside its own geographical frontiers. Taking this fact into consideration, folk literature may be included in Bengali curriculum at university level. Also, through the excellence of its literary oeuvre as well as intellectual rigours and depth it can establish a linkage with world literature. In this regard, Bengali curriculum at university level has undergone only a quantitative expansion, not qualitative. Resultantly, it has lost its depth dimension as well

as intellectual insight or aesthetic height. In literature inner enrichment through intellectual rigour is more important than outward curricular expansion and various university curriculum reforms in Bengali have failed to attain this objective. Knight and Yorke (2004, p. 71) seem to echo the same point when they say that the career relevance of English does not stem from the subject *per se*; it mainly arises from “the way in which it is seen to prove the students’ wider intellectual abilities.” As Das (2006, p. 376) puts it, actually, “the real worth [of Bengali] depends on how much time, intellectual toil, talent and intelligence its acquisition involves and also on its comparative intellectual worth in relation to other branches of knowledge *per se* [my translation].”

Also, as Das (2006) elaborates, in order for literature to be treated as an academic discipline at university, its sheer ability to provide pleasure or simply arouse our aesthetic sense is not enough. It should be able to refine human taste and aesthetic sense; it needs to be able to whet our power of judgement and cleanse our sense of judgement. It needs to equip human beings with knowledge to understand the process of creativity as well as the significance of interconnection between the artist and the surroundings that influence her creativity. In this regard, Das (2006) finds Bengali literature wanting in many ways. As well as it has not succeeded, in pursuant to the traditions of the classics, to build or introduce such scholarly studies as literary criticism, biographical literature, retrieving and preserving ancient texts, studies of ancient language, research on deciphering ancient scripts, editing principles, stylistics or metrical studies of old poetry.

The ways to overcome such obstacles are not very difficult. Still Bengali suffers from its insularity; it is yet to build meaningful connection with other rich languages that have time-tested literary and scholarly traditions. Researchers in Bengali, following the legacy of its early scholars, are required to be well-versed in some other languages so that they can adopt and apply knowledge of other languages to Bengali. The realization that knowledge is an organic whole and its acquisition is dependent on cross-disciplinary collaboration can only help Bengali overcome its current insularity.

Bengali suffers from a dearth of research culture. It is observed that the course curriculum is at times stretched simply by repeating the same topics at the cost of such other subjects as research methodology. Poetry, drama, and other genres are rehashed in the curriculum but proper importance is not attached to many important areas such as principles of criticism, critical theory, history of literary criticism. Das (2006) seems to be pertinent to

point out that it looks like Bengali remains unswayed by the recent revolutionary developments in the outside world in the domain of language-related research.

The students of Bengali enter university to study language and literature that is their own. Unlike the students of English literature who have to grapple with difficult linguistic and cultural disorientation, these students have no reasons to spend four/ five years at university to take an MA or BA qualification that simply follows an age-old curriculum without any innovative courses. Within the same time frame their sphere of knowledge can be diversified by offering courses from cognate fields such as an “in-depth study of a foreign language richer than Bengali, history of Bengal, history of the origin and formation of the Bengali language, general linguistics theory, principles of language analysis, history of Bengali scripts, researching ancient texts and their complexities, book editing in conjunction with principles of editing, linkage or relationship between social change and emerging literary trends, relationship between literature and religious thoughts and movements in Bengal, literary theory, principles of literary appreciation and their diversity, stylistics and metrical studies, comparative literature, cross-literary influence, relationship between Bengali literature and other social sciences” (Das 2006, pp. 380-381 [my translation]). The same researcher further claims that Bengali can emerge as a full-fledged academic discipline only through reforming its curriculum in line with what he has envisioned above. Not only that, by integrating all these fields into Bengali literature the latter will become more systematized as an academic discipline and get enriched through cross-disciplinary influences.

A closer scrutiny of the course syllabi at Dhaka University reveals that its course offerings are too traditional and have undergone little reform or change in incorporating new trends other vernacular departments in the West have adopted. Notably, if pitted against Das’s disciplinary prescription, Bengali at Dhaka University seems to be lacking in many ways as an academic discipline. Its curriculum is simply rehashed or repeated over four/five years and covers areas that have hardly diversified its course contents. As Ali (2006b) puts it, it has not included any courses outside the traditional parameters that were first delimited in 1921. The expansion is simply quantitative in line with the widening of the field through contribution to traditional genres by emerging writers and poets. The current curriculum has incorporated none of the above areas which Das (2006) recommends for disciplinary maturity. As well as the Department is yet to establish any cross-disciplinary collaboration with such other departments as linguistics, English, journalism, Sanskrit,

Pali, Urdu, Persian. Nor does it offer a major course in a richer language to supplement its knowledge base as well as to overcome its current disciplinary insularity.

According to the reality on the ground, graduates in Bengali literature have little ready employability in the country and the reasons are not that hard to discover. They are: the sheer number or oversupply of graduates that come out every year from different colleges and universities; the traditional way or the age-old curriculum according to which they are taught; the primitive course structure that has not gone through any changes to accommodate recent trends or to introduce new job-oriented courses.

The course structure is straightforward – traditional Honours, Masters, MPhil and PhD. The last two are out of the bound of our consideration. Similarly, the course curriculums and syllabi are traditional as almost all the courses are pure literature oriented. Such course curriculums and syllabi are no doubt able to produce graduates with a wider knowledge of the field. Again, their knowledge remains purely theory-based without any tangible skills that have practical use or are career-focused. Graduates can be made more employable in the job market if different Bengali departments, with Dhaka University at the forefront of change, can initiate the following reform initiatives:

As most graduates will go to teaching at school and college levels, the course curriculums may incorporate teaching related components, courses of Applied Linguistics type, courses from the Department of Linguistics, a compulsory unit from English literature. The Masters program may be branched off to incorporate a separate stream in Applied Linguistics. It may be mentioned here that the English Department at Dhaka University has an MA stream in Applied Linguistics (for English graduates only). Besides, the Honours program of the English Department has undergone significant curricular reforms to include a number of teaching related practical oriented courses. Even the Linguistics Department has a course on English language teaching.

Bangladesh is unique in that its print media is very robust (despite poor literacy, the country boasts of 424 dailies and 39 magazines [DS news report published on June 29, 2009 under the caption 424 newspapers being published in country] as it has to cater to a vast news-loving (derogatively, though, gossip-loving as well) readership. Many graduates in Bengali may have natural flair in writing and with some formal training or exposure to professional editing and writing skills they can increase their job prospects in this sector. The Bengali Department can curtail some of its pure literary courses and

introduce courses related to newspaper editing and production. (Such courses may be offered in conjunction or collaboration with other departments such as Linguistics, Journalism, English with mutual arrangements for credit transfer). Notably, the idea of credit transfer from one department to another is yet to take root at Dhaka University at large.

Publishing, especially academic publishing at secondary, higher secondary, college levels, is a burgeoning sector in Bangladesh. Book stalls selling academic as well as non-academic books are a common sight from the city to the rural business centres. Books are written and published by unprofessional people, and if we have to believe different media reports that highlight how such books and publications are full of mistakes and other aberrations, professionally trained editors and publishers can enhance the prestige of this sector. Even books published by the National Textbooks Curriculum Board (NTCB) are not immune from such lapses, and recent newspaper articles point to such weaknesses. A DS editorial (March 3, 2008, Errors in textbooks: Take corrective action as early as possible) highlights the ‘appalling’ nature of this issue: “THE issue of school textbooks being full of factual, grammatical and spelling errors is serious enough to have drawn the attention of all concerned long ago. Unfortunately, the books are being published year after year with the same glaring mistakes that can only misinform, mislead and confuse the young learners. ... there are spelling mistakes and grammatically inaccurate sentences which can cause much consternation to those who still care about proper learning. ... It is indeed a matter of shame that our school textbooks are of very low quality which calls into question the efficiency of not only the NCTB but also the efficacy of the education system as a whole.” To make its graduates employable in the publishing and related sectors, Dhaka University’s Bengali Department can follow the Monash trends and introduce the following courses:

Graduate Certificate in Publishing and Editing which is “designed to provide editorial and publication management skills to those having aspirations to become involved in scholarly, commercial, educational, academic and corporate publishing, to further their careers and attainments in publishing, or to establish their own small publishing business” (MU Course Handbook). This course is also offered at Graduate Diploma and Masters levels. An advantage of the Publishing and Editing courses is that they are articulated with provisions for upgrading the Certificate course to the two higher courses.

Creative writing in Bangladesh is not negligible, nor is there a dearth of readers. The Ekushey Book Fair held every year on Bangla Academy premises on the occasion of Language Martyrs' Day (February 21) draws thousands of book lovers. The same Fair publishes a large number of creative books. However, most of the creative writers are self-taught or self-made. In Bangladesh, no formal academic courses in creative writing are offered in public universities and colleges. The Bengali Department at Dhaka can include creative writing components in their existing programs or introduce separate courses such as diploma, postgraduate diploma or even MA course. Professionally designed creative writing courses have made significant inroad into the literature departments of western universities. In Australia, for example, Monash and Melbourne Universities have MA programs in Creative Writing. Melbourne offers Creative Writing course at BA (majoring in Creative Writing), Diploma, Postgraduate Diploma, and PhD levels as well. Creative Writing courses are on offer in many other Australian universities; some universities such as the University of the Sunshine Coast offer only Creative Writing programs instead of pure literature.

The English Department at La Trobe University, Melbourne, offers a Graduate Diploma in Professional Writing and Speech. As the Course Handbook outlines: "This course is designed for graduates in any discipline who want a comprehensive introduction to the art and craft of writing and may wish to develop their skills in public speech and communication. It is directly vocational in two ways. First, it provides the kinds of advanced communication skills required in a wide range of employment. Second, it is suitable for those who are planning a career in creative writing, or in writing for the media, or who may need to write and deliver speeches" (LTU Course Handbook).

Arts graduates in Bangladesh, especially those qualified in language and literature, suffer a lot of discrimination for lack of linkage of their courses to the job market or for lack of focus on specific career. The La Trobe course on Professional Writing and Speech which is offered in many other Australian universities is an example of how professionally non-focused courses can attain professional bias through innovative course offerings. The Bengali Department at Dhaka University that produces hundreds of graduates every year with no viable job openings can reform its current course structure and introduce such professionally focused courses. While students from any disciplines can benefit from such courses, language and literature graduates given their natural aptitude towards writing as

well as their exposure to writing oriented courses may especially benefit from courses of this type.

Instead of focusing on too many literary courses that overlap at different year levels, the course curriculum can be modified to include Children's Literature, Translation Studies, Novel to Film, Crime Writing, Sci-fi, Cultural Studies, Cultural Policy Studies, Communication, Archival Studies, Museum Studies, Tourism Studies, Textual Criticism, Popular Writing and Criticism, Biography Writing. Notably, many of these courses have direct linkage with the job market.

The weakness of Bengali literature as an academic discipline which Das (2006) has justifiably pointed out may be overcome through a robust and rigorous research culture. Its artistic, aesthetic and purely literary worth as well as popular appeal should be supplemented by intellectual and scholarly rigours. The Honours and Masters programs can introduce research components instead of the current 100 per cent coursework and taught components. As already mentioned, as a discipline Bengali has a very poor linkage with the employment market. Some courses/units in English literature or language may increase the employment prospects of its graduates. Postgraduate qualifications in journalism, media studies, public relations, leadership training, theatre studies, cultural industries management may enhance its job prospects. In other words, an interdisciplinary approach, offering Bengali in conjunction with other cognate but employable disciplines, shedding the current pure theoretical orientation, not rehashing the same courses over and over again are the possible solutions to its current employment ruts and intellectual stagnation. As well as the supply of graduates (the stereotypical or real belief is that getting a degree in Bengali requires little effort and rigour and as such it is very easy) should be restricted through appropriate intellectual rigours, raising assessment standard or conscious curriculum design to this effect. At the same time curriculum reform should consciously target raising literacy and high level language proficiency which is always in demand and which graduates can use for further education, in teaching, leadership, and administration. Above all, curriculum reforms should aim at enhancing creativity, analytical skills, and it will not be an exaggeration to say that creative people with an active mind can always find their way in the labyrinth of life.

### 7.1.3 Linguistics

According to Quality Assurance Agency - QAA, Britain (2007, Subject Benchmark Statements: Linguistics), “Linguistics is concerned with language in all its forms, spoken, written and signed.” A unique human attribute, language (and its study) has both theoretical and practical implications. Language and linguistic behaviour are highly structured and its study is systematic and can be elucidated through a number of theoretical and empirical methodologies. As well as it is guided by established scientific, social, cognitive, cultural and psychological phenomena and concerns that make its study both intellectually and practically rewarding. Its study systematically examines “physical properties of the sound waves in utterances”, the “intentions of speakers towards others in conversations and the social contexts in which conversations are embedded” (ibid). Its different sub-branches deal with how languages are structured, how they are different, how they can be learned and acquired, how they undergo change, and so on.

In Bangladesh, teaching and research in linguistics (and linguistics as a discipline itself) had evolved out of the Bengali Department at Dhaka University long before its introduction as a full-fledged discipline in 1992. The lone department in Bangladesh up to this stage, it “has a unique environment for studying linguistics and doing research on language and its elements” (Yasmin & Rahman 2008, np). It offers BA (Hons) and MA programs as well as research degrees such as MPhil and PhD. It has a plan, as Yasmin and Rahman inform, to introduce a diploma course in language and communication for media personnel, government officials and NGO executives who want to develop their skills in language planning and policy making. These researchers stress the importance of studying linguistics in Bangladesh contexts; and according to them, linguistics can be useful in the following ways:

It can help formulate language-related policy as well as assist in the eradication of illiteracy from the country through the development of the Bengali language. While many governmental and non-governmental organizations are currently working to rid the country of the curse of illiteracy, such efforts will gain greater momentum when professionally trained linguists are given appropriate role.

In Bangladesh, there are more than 40 tribal or ethnic languages and many of them have no text books or even orthography. The Linguistics Department may shoulder a greater responsibility in preparing text books, primers, and in classifying those languages according to their typology. The government has of late established the International Mother Language

Institute (IMLI) and it has been tasked with the responsibility of promoting indigenous languages as well as performing such responsibilities as outlined here. In this aspect, the Linguistics Department with its professionally qualified linguists and researchers and other resources at its disposal is better positioned to assist IMLI in these tasks.

Wider introduction of linguistics will acquaint students and scholars in Bangladesh with the idea of educational linguistics which is still a peripheral field of studies. It can play significant role in the design and development of curriculum, language teaching methodology, teaching of English and other languages, and management of language classrooms. Also, linguists in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, can help people with speech impairment which is a common phenomenon in this country. The Linguistics Department can go a long way in training language experts and clinical linguists in speech pathology and related expertise.

In Bangladesh, the study of dialect is yet to develop as a viable knowledge area although Bengali has a lot of dialects or language variants (Yasmin & Rahman, 2008, np). As these academics think, this interesting language domain is still unexplored and no linguistic census is conducted until today. They feel that it is time to initiate a language census under the direct supervision of trained linguists. For this purpose the study of language or dialectology needs to be promoted in the country, and needless to say, the Linguistics Department at Dhaka University has a significant role to perform in this regard.

A closer analysis of the Linguistics Honours program at Dhaka University and the range of courses it offers reveals both merits and demerits. The strengths of the program can be enumerated as follows:

Its main strength is the breadth; the program that runs over four years covers as many as 36 courses, excluding the courses from other departments. As the Department's course syllabus reveals, alongside the traditional areas of linguistics, it offers a wide range of courses that give it breadth and variety. Courses such as Historical Linguistics, Study of Writing System, Evolution of Linguistics Thoughts, Comparative Linguistics, Language and Language Families in the World, Language Planning, Lexicography, Philosophy of Language add variety to the program.

It has chosen courses from local context and the courses that deserve mention in this regard are: Origin and Development of Bangla Language; Language Study in Bangla Speaking Regions; Contemporary Bangla Language; Bengali and Allied Languages. These courses enhance the relevance of the Linguistics programs in terms of its local context – cultural, social, and historical. Notably, the courses of general nature – Introduction to Linguistics, Phonetics, Morphology, Semantics, Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics, Stylistics, Pragmatics – have also been presented in Bangladesh and Bengali contexts. Such contextual relevance of the program is no doubt its strength.

The program has also been designed so as to make it application orientated. The courses – for example, Translation Study, Computational Linguistics, English Teaching Methodology and ELT, Applied Linguistics, Sign Language and Semiotics, Language of the Mass Media, Language Pathology and Therapy – are practical and application orientated, and on completion of these courses students may gain tangible employment skills that are in demand in the media industry as well as in different educational settings. Besides, the course Language Survey and Data Collection and Language Analysis may help students acquire research and survey skills. This course specifically targets researching local dialects, indigenous languages, and linguistic census.

The course has some glaring drawbacks. Despite its breadth and quantitative strength, much closer scrutiny reveals that it lacks depth. Some of its components appear to be too theoretical and restricted to the bare basics of Linguistics. They typically deal with such simple aspects as defining basic linguistics terms and terminologies or delimitating the scope and jurisdiction of the course concerned. Let us scrutinise Dhaka's *Introduction to Linguistics* unit. The syllabus of the Department outlines the contents thus:

What is language?

The role of language: Dialect, language and the individual, different theories relevant to language.

What is linguistics?

The scope of linguistics.

The importance of studying linguistics; different branches and methods of linguistics – phonetics, morphology, syntax and semantics, methods of language analysis (living and dead language).

The above course contents have all the hallmarks of the typical course syllabi of any departments of colleges or universities in Bangladesh. As it appears, the above course contents are shallow as well as too theoretical. The course lacks intellectual rigour as it is presented in a quite cursory or simplistic way. Similarly, other courses seem to have limited and superficial course contents. Besides, the assessment method mainly being exam-based and the course contents narrow, students will rely more on rote learning. Questions are predictable as they are to match the contents of the syllabus (What is Linguistics or what is its scope?, for example).

The MA program of the Department consists of seven courses out of which students are required to take four as prescribed by the Department. The course structure as well as the assessment system is purely traditional – the former being theory-based while the latter examination-based. As part of the assessment process, only 100 marks out of a total of 500 is set aside for essay, exercise and oral types of questions and examinations. As obvious, the course offerings are very narrow and lack practical components. Only one course (Course 507) Statistical Linguistics seems to have some practical orientation in that it is numeracy based and combines theory and application. As well as it seems to involve some intellectual rigour, manipulating figures, charts, graphs which may improve students' lateral thinking. However, the way the course is structured and presented does not transcend acquisition of theory-based knowledge. The course objectives seem to target covering the ground that involves such basics as defining, delimiting scopes or jurisdiction of the field, importance of studying this course, and so on. Also, the Course 506 Neurolinguistics seems to have some orientation towards application. But given these courses' optional nature students are free to skip them. Another glaring defect of the Neurolinguistics course is that it is purely science based (as for example, it covers such topics as brain imaging, surgical techniques, and so) and it is not clear how students without any prior access to science and related fields will handle this course. Introducing such courses without appropriate delivery systems in place makes the curriculum a paper curriculum. As well as this course, its content and the recommended readings indicate that its studying will require high level of English language proficiency. The students' previous Bengali medium background at Honours level may not have prepared them to handle such a course presented in English.

While in Bangladesh linguistics as a discipline has social, linguistic, cultural, political and historical relevance, its linkage with the job market is very tenuous. Linguistics on its own is not geared to equip its graduates with employable skills. Its study in collaboration with other

subjects can enhance its prospects in the employment market. As the QAA aptly puts it, "... much of linguistics is interdisciplinary in both the issues it addresses and the methodologies brought to bear." Therefore, it can enrich itself, enhance its relevance as well as widen its intellectual parameter with knowledge gained from the following diverse fields, some of which have direct linkage with vocation:

Linguistics can effectively collaborate with mass media and journalism. Journalism that deals with language can benefit from linguistics and at the same time the latter can enhance its applicability through the practical skills the study of journalism involves. As well as it can collaborate with and complement Bengali, English and other language-related subjects. It can help languages reorient to teaching, which can greatly increase its employment prospects. Notably, applied linguistics as a discipline has better employment prospects because of its orientation to language teaching.

Its study in tandem with psychology is important in that it helps linguistics derive proper insight into human behaviour as well as the mental make-up of human beings as linguists need to understand the different mechanisms of language processing, learning and retaining. Sociology and anthropology can help linguists understand the origin or different pedigrees of languages and their dialects.

It can collaborate with economics and business studies as business and related activities involve communication and understanding foreign languages. Linguistics as a discipline can help understand how communication occurs in an international context; it is also able to assist in devising means or principles of solving problems or issues that arise in cross-national communication. Law and related fields, legal studies for example, can benefit from linguistics, especially when legal issues need to be dealt with in ethnically diverse societies where communication assumes cross-cultural dimensions (MU Linguistics Website). And the importance of studying computer science in combination with linguistics can hardly be overemphasized given the former's importance in the current-day world. Considered from these perspectives, the inclusion of such non-linguistic subjects as have either utilitarian value or interdependence in terms of shared knowledge may work towards enhancing the employability of linguistics graduates.

As to the projection about the job prospects of Linguistics graduates in Bangladesh, all primary and secondary teachers' training institutes in the country should appoint linguists or language specialists to equip trainee teachers with appropriate language teaching and related

skills. Also, in order to improve language performance and competence of students in the colleges and universities of the country, each of these institutions can create at least two positions for linguists (Yasmin nd).

#### **7.1.4. Philosophy**

In the current world context, studying philosophy has assumed new dimensions; it is no longer regarded as “searching for a black cat in a dark room” (Dastagir 2007, np), nor is it quibbling or wrangling about abstract or impractical things. Its foundation being logical and rational thinking, it is integral to human intellectual activities, as well as critical analysis of “concepts, views, ideas, or beliefs” (ibid). Its principal virtue is to teach “not what to think, but how to think. ... The skills it hones are the ability to analyse, to question orthodoxies” (Anonymous 2008). Many students come to the course not to become philosophers but to use the discipline in their lives. In this regard, Riordan (2008) terms philosophy as a ‘practical’ discipline that can, among other things, help people make decisions; it helps understand life and reality in the light of new perspectives. Instead of imparting academic knowledge, it should put emphasis more on forming a habit of mind or philosophizing or thinking. In this regard, the study of philosophy assumes utility only when it is taught through appropriate teaching strategies and engaging students in philosophy, which can be done “if we can connect the questions of the disciplines to issues that are vital to the students themselves” (Riordan 2008, p. 265).

In the context of fluid local and global political climates, intercultural philosophical dialogue has assumed a new dimension and meaning in upholding unity and peace in the world (Dastagir 2007). In this context, the UNESCO has undertaken in line with its mission several projects such as “philosophy of science and culture of peace”, “philosophy and democracy”, “philosophy and human rights”, “the future of human beings”, “philosophy facing world problems: poverty, global justice” (ibid), and this points to the increasing usefulness of philosophy as a discipline. In the current world riven by “tension, contention, conflict, intolerance, violence”, as Dastagir (2007) thinks, “philosophers are not only critical thinkers ... but ... also systematic social science researchers” about today’s “unresolved problems and unanswered questions.” They are able to influence policy-making at national and international levels with their “ground-breaking academic research” dealing with “contemporary critical issues of concern” as well as facilitating debates on such issues (ibid).

A survey conducted by SERCO, a British service company, confirms that philosophy graduates are in greater demand in the job market. Employers are interested in people who can be trained as leaders, and open-mindedness towards any issues and the ability to think with different approaches are some of the attributes they value in their prospective leaders cum employees. They think philosophy and philosophical approaches can promote and instil such skills (Shepherd 2007). The same viewpoint is iterated by the Management Consultancies Association (in Britain) which thinks that philosophy graduates traditionally have stronger grounding in analytical thinking which employers prize. The National Health Service (NHS, Britain) increasingly seeks philosophers, and “[g]rowth areas in the NHS include clinical ethicists, who assist doctors and nurses. Medical ethics committees and ethics training courses for staff are also growing. More and more people are needed to comment on moral issues in healthcare, such as abortion” (Shepherd 2007, np).

Philosophy, according to Professor Simon Blackburn at Cambridge, can be made popular by shedding off its esoteric posture. It is notable that Prof Blackburn and his colleagues at Cambridge write user-friendly books on philosophy that are making philosophy accessible and comprehensible to the mainstream. Moreover, scholars tasked with designing university courses on philosophy “have also become sensitive to claims that their subject has no relevance to the modern day” (ibid). Also, Blackburn refers to the changes that have occurred in philosophy’s curricular jurisdiction: “In the years after the Second World War, there was a sort of Wittgensteinian air about philosophy, which meant practitioners were proud of the fact that they appeared slightly esoteric and were not doing anything practical. There was very little political philosophy, and moral philosophy was disengaged from people’s actual moral problems, and that did lead to the subject being marginalised. That has changed. Political philosophy is a central part of the Cambridge course” (cited in Shepherd 2007, np).

In a world striving to adjust to revolutionary technological innovations, the importance of philosophy has increased dramatically. The UNESCO has launched a program promoting ethics concerning science and technology whose mission is to make the public aware of the moral and social issues such technological innovations have spawned (Dastagir 2007). Kunstler (2006), idealistically though, envisions a universe that will have a greater role for philosophy. The planet, beset with uncertainty spawned by technological *laissez-faire*, will need more creative and sane people to save it from an impending cataclysmic situation. This is a time that requires scientists, administrators, politicians and policy planners to be guided

by philosophical insights and ethical concerns alongside their professional knowledge and skills.

Studying philosophy is particularly important in Bangladesh in the current socio-economic and political context. Continued economic development as well as peace and prosperity are conditional upon stable and healthy socio-economic and political situations, and that can be achieved only through rational human beings by means of well-thought-out decision-making, moral acts and above all logical thinking process and rational choice. Dastagir (2007, np) considers knowledge of philosophy very relevant to Bangladesh as a “strong ethical foundation in education and sound reasoning of our views provided by philosophy can positively strengthen the capacities of our sense of values and broaden our minds for critical appraisal of our own actions – a soul-searching way of curbing white-collar crime and blue-collar corruption in a country like Bangladesh.”

In Bangladesh’s context, philosophy as a discipline can play a vital role in cultivating among the people rationalism and logical positivism and through them enlightenment. Barman (2008) appears to be right when he points out that the very nature of Indian philosophy, mysticism, in contrast to western materialistic philosophy, has failed to infuse in people rationalistic and materialistic belief which, in turn, has precluded European-style enlightenment or reformation movement. Barman believes that once philosophy, as an academic and scholastic pursuit, is well established in Bangladesh, it can pave the way for intellectual movement based on progressive beliefs and thoughts.

Philosophy as an academic discipline, as Dastagir (2007) puts it, is gaining burgeoning popularity, and many European countries, following UNESCO policy, have introduced ethics and logic at schools and universities; some British universities offer an MA in Philosophy of Physics, Philosophy of Management, Philosophy of Biodiversity, and the like. They run Centres like Centre for Applied Ethics, Centre for Practical and Professional Ethics, Centre for Philosophical Counselling, etc. Bangladesh, according to Dastagir (2007), needs to follow suit and take necessary measures to introduce logic and ethics at all levels of its education system.

### **7.1.4.1 Applied philosophy**

Applied philosophy, a branch of philosophy based on “a study of practical affairs and activities,” is contributing significantly to philosophy’s utilitarian value (Dolhenty, nd/np). One important branch of applied philosophy that has practical implications in solving real-life problems is applied ethics. Ethical problems the public, government, professionals currently face are quite different from what they used to confront a few decades ago. Such developments as corporate crimes, corruption at high places, human rights abuses and genocide, cross-border drug-trafficking, scientific and technological breakthroughs making way for cloning and other genetic engineering practices, encroachment on privacy due to communication and information technologies have generated critical moral dilemmas which existing legal systems as well as religion cannot solve. Their complexities call for expert solution and handling. However, applying philosophical theory merely mechanically to ethical problems cannot solve such issues. It requires an intricate interplay between philosophical theory and scientific knowledge and data to reach a solution. Besides, philosophical theory works at different levels of abstractions – both high and low level of abstractions. This necessitates clear understanding of theories which only professionally trained philosophers or ethicists can become an authority on. In all the above cases philosophy, especially applied philosophy such as applied ethics, can play a vital role.

Bioethics that mainly draws on science, sociology, and other disciplines is another area of applied philosophy “where the practical applications are obvious and where developments in the sciences continually pose new problems and open up new areas of research” (MU Centre for Bioethics Website). As to the importance of bioethics, the Monash Centre for Bioethics foresees that in the current age of medical and biological breakthroughs “most individuals will, at some stage of their lives, face decisions which involve fundamental questions in bioethics” (ibid). Decisions about having or not having child, abortion or terminating pregnancy, donating organs, determining genetic conditions through medical checkups, taking care of the elderly parents – all these issues involve making moral or ethical decisions that require expertise in bioethics. Besides, there are major public issues – what should the law say about abortion? Is there enough funding for public hospitals? should the government fund stem cell research involving human embryos? – which too involve questions of bioethics.

Any country's overall economic development depends on equal educational development of all its citizens including minority religious and ethnic groups. Only an education system guided by moral and ethical standards that call for equal treatment of all irrespective of ethnico-religious identities can ensure an unbiased intellectual development of people belonging to different groups and classes. To build such an ideal society, politicians and policymakers need moral ethical guidance and inspirations which only properly trained ethicists and moral philosophers can provide. A country can produce such moral guardians by incorporating ethics in its education system at different levels, especially at higher education.

There is a close utilitarian relationship between philosophical ethics and economic development (Miller 2001). Despite fears of imposed ethical constraints, business ethics, an important branch of philosophical ethics, contributes to economic development in important ways. Business ethics can create a healthy and tolerant economic environment that can expedite economic development in any society, especially in developing societies where ethical values are yet to properly develop. A balanced regulation of business practices through ideal ethical standard can help develop a stable socio-political system which in turn promotes economic growth. Human rights abuse, as for example, can destabilize political situation thus negatively affecting economic growth. Professional philosophers and ethicists may be able to help any government to ensure political stability through appropriate policy guidance so that the economy can grow uninterrupted. It may be mentioned here that economic growth that helps a country to rid itself of poverty and material deprivation is an ethical means to another ethical end.

As to the complaints about the constraints the practice of ethical values imposes on economic development, Miller (2001, np) says: "Ethics necessarily constrains economic development just because no-one in their right mind thinks that anything goes as far as economic development is concerned." He cites as examples the cases of slavery and drug trafficking which can never be acceptable ways of making profit for economic development. Here comes the question of restraints and only acceptable ethical standards acquired through professional education programs at institutions of higher education can decide the extent of constraints so that such constraints do not result in overregulation.

### **7.1.4.2 Philosophy at Dhaka University**

Dhaka University has had its philosophy department since the very year of its founding in 1921. Currently, it offers a four-year Honours and one-year MA. As with many other humanities departments, philosophy at Dhaka University has lost its edge in the face of commercialization of knowledge. The academic curriculum of the current philosophy department, however, has not undergone significant reform to make it job-market oriented. Its Honours program appears to follow the traditional curriculum of any typical philosophy department and incorporates all the traditional courses of this discipline. However, it has included such courses as Applied Philosophy (Course Code 404), Environmental philosophy (Code: 404). In addition, the Philosophy Program has been given an interdisciplinary look through incorporation of courses from other allied disciplines. They are English Language (Code: 103), History of Civilization (Code: 106), Psychology (203), Sociology and Anthropology (Code: 203), Economics (Code: 304), Philosophy of Science (Code: 402). Similarly, the MA Program of the Department has a mix of both traditional and contemporary courses that give it practical as well as interdisciplinary perspectives. Alongside traditional courses, the Department's MA Program include such other courses as Postmodernism (Code: 501), Practical Ethics (Code: 508), Philosophy of Language (Code: 502), Philosophy of Science (Code: 509), Philosophy of Economics (Code: 518), Contemporary Political Thought (Code: 516), Philosophy of History (Code: 519), Philosophy of Law (Code: 520).

Outwardly the course syllabi demonstrate breadth as they cover almost all the areas of philosophy as a discipline. However, on closer examination it becomes obvious that it is purely theory-based and designed to acquaint students with knowledge that does not go beyond defining the individual field, its scope, different theorists' linear contribution to it. The context is purely global without any endeavour to particularize it in Bangladesh context. Obviously, any field's theoretical grounding as well as the existing oeuvres in their wider perspectives cannot be ignored; however, there should be minimum attempts to present them in the local context along with the varied moral and philosophical issues. While the modern trends in any applied field consist in positing it in the context of the country concerned with a view to solving problems, none of the courses and their course profiles (other than the Course: Philosophy of the Bengalis) is presented in Bangladesh perspectives. Even the course Practical Ethics is not designed to consciously give it some local focus. Besides, it is quite apparent that whatever reform Dhaka's philosophy department has undergone is limited

to individual offerings at unit levels. No conscious efforts to introduce purely job-oriented full-length or self-contained courses are visible. Dhaka's philosophy program may be reformed to make it relevant to the local context as well as local problems in the following ways:

The few units of applied philosophy, applied in name only though, are included in the syllabus are fragmented in nature. The Department should introduce self-contained certificate/diploma or postgraduate level courses in applied philosophy, applied ethics, bioethics. and their course contents need to be designed in the local context. Although applied courses such as bioethics that deal with the negative impacts of genetic sciences are yet to have full relevance in Bangladesh context, courses dealing with healthcare services and funding, poor and non-standard medical facilities, lack of adequate access of the populace to health services, doctors' poor services to patients, discriminatory treatment meted to the poor patients, doctors' unethical practices such as charging high fees, negligence in performing duties may cover the proposed bioethics courses. Notably, a newspaper article entitled Medical Ethics (Islam 2009) reveals the sorry state of the medical profession in Bangladesh where it has lost its dignity and image to some extent. The article holds doctors responsible for their unethical practice such as charging high fees, neglecting professional responsibility while working at public hospital, luring away patients from government hospitals to their own clinics. As well as any applied ethics courses need target the massive bureaucratic and political corruption the country is currently plagued with (notably, Bangladesh topped the list of corrupt countries in the world a number of times in the not-too-distant past[Transparency International website]). An independent unit on business ethics may bring to the fore the deleterious effects of hoarding and profiteering, price syndication, and devise ways and means to fight such dubious practices.

The existing Applied Philosophy course (Course No. 403: Applied Philosophy) needs to be revamped to give local context. The course contents are purely theory based, and this is obvious from its course structure. The components such as human rights, terrorism, law, business ethics, market economy deserve mention in this regard. Students are simply required to define and become familiar with their jurisdiction. Their application value or how they can be applied to real-life situation is not targeted. Although these components are meant for Bangladeshi students in Bangladesh context, the topics covered do not even mention the Bangladesh context. Nor do the recommended readings include any books on Bangladesh. The whole unit may be redesigned to give it contextual relevance by positing it in

Bangladesh context. As for example, the course contents of business ethics may be presented and taught in terms of the business practices in Bangladesh. Other units such as environmental philosophy, philosophy of law can be reformed in the same spirit to give them problem-solving orientation in local context.

The value of philosophical studies and logic is nowhere more important than in Bangladesh given the latter's social, intellectual backwardness, religious orthodoxy and superstition. In order to free the populace from such curses, they need to be imbued with scientific and progressive world views, rational and critical thinking. Logic and philosophy can really accomplish this task provided courses are redesigned with this objective in view. Western materialistic and rationalistic philosophy with its emphasis on scientificity and scientific orientation can specifically target the vulnerability of Bangladeshis in terms of their orthodox attitude and outlook and suggest remedies through a relevant knowledge of logic and philosophy. Courses should be tailored with explicit objective of ridding the society of social and religious orthodoxies or false and logically and scientifically untenable beliefs and practices.

In terms of intellectual readiness and awareness for any socio-political and intellectual change or revolution such as the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, Bangladesh is still centuries behind the West. In initiating such reforms and revolution in Bangladesh philosophy and allied academic disciplines can play a vital role. Whatever changes Bangladesh has undergone in terms of intellectual and social transformation are an outcome of a few social thinkers and writers who form the core of a civil society. Most of them are educated in the humanistic lines; and philosophy, because of its very role in developing logical and rational thinking process, has a greater role in this regard. While philosophy graduates acquire such attributes as a happy coincidence of disciplinary knowledge, conscious curriculum design targeting social and intellectual transformation can make a big difference. Courses such as western rationalistic philosophy and Bangladesh, traditional beliefs and philosophical beliefs, Muslims and western philosophy, western philosophy and Muslim philosophy in comparative perspectives can pit local tradition, superstition and beliefs against progressive and rationalistic Western philosophical beliefs and ideals and bring about revolutionary changes in people's belief patterns which any backward society needs to effect social and intellectual transformation.

Philosophy in Bangladesh is still purely an academic discipline and students come to study it out of sheer interest or as the last option in their admission preferences. As an academic discipline, it is expected to impart to students knowledge that is mainly esoteric and abstruse in nature. It looks like such students are more interested in showing off their pedantry or engaging themselves in witty quips or scholarly discussions arcane in nature. They like to behave more like traditional philosophers engaged in quibbles than taking interest in the practicality of their surroundings. In order for philosophy to gain its lost ground, its practitioners need to change their habit of wallowing in showy pedantry and bring their discipline to the reach of common people to solve the problems they confront in their workaday existence. This can be achieved through shedding off its overly pedantic intellectuality and reforming or reorienting its course curriculum to problem-solving or to issues Bangladeshis have to grapple with in their everyday existence. As for example, the Course 106 History of Civilization (a chronological description of different civilizations from the stone age to the French Revolution) can follow the Contemporary Civilization Program at Columbia College (discussed earlier) and orient this course towards current context to solve problems with clues derived from past civilization. Similarly, the course General Ethics (Course No. 105), purely theoretical in nature, can be contextualized to suit Bangladesh situation by positing it to deal with ethical issues of environmental degradation, use of religion in politics, ethical commitment of individual to society, role of morality in Bangladesh society; the Course (305) Muslim Philosophers can be presented and taught to show their relevance to Bangladesh society as well as to the Muslim community in the current world context. The same way the Course Social Philosophers (No. 308) has even a greater prospect to be given application value and used in Bangladesh context. In other words, most of the theory-based courses can be awarded application value. What the course designers need to do is to be creative and imaginative to change the course contents to local context and needs. This exercise will be beneficial in a number of ways: courses will lose their too theoretical or esoteric nature that deters students' active involvement; they will attain practical or tangible application value; students will take greater interest in the courses because of their contextualization; society will benefit from their problem-solving ability.

There is no doubt that philosophy as an academic discipline has its intrinsic value and it is far better-positioned to equip students with transferable skills such as the ability for effective verbal communication; ability to think clearly and coherently; to argue convincingly and logically. However, simply a paper curriculum without the will or resources to implement its objective such curriculum objectives, no matter how nice and attractive it looks on paper,

will not be able to translate curriculum objectives into reality. The Philosophy curriculum at Dhaka looks in some cases more ambitious while in many cases falls short of its objectives. Because curriculum objectives remain either unarticulated or unimplemented mainly due to a lack of will to implement them or for shortage of creative teachers, most students fail to reap the fruits of such an intellectually as well as practically-oriented discipline. Philosophy students are simply considered intellectual layabouts who graduate without any tangible academic or practical skills, and this is the impression society and employers have of philosophy graduates in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, in the not-too-distant past, philosophy was a stellar discipline and its graduates were considered competent for a number of lucrative positions – in the civil service, in the media, in the legal profession. Although as a discipline it was still more theoretical and knowledge oriented, the intellectual rigour and efforts students were required to put for success in the examination prepared them for such varied professions. If Dhaka's Philosophy Department wants its previous glory back, it needs to make its courses intellectually rigorous alongside making them more reality oriented. The current practice of simply delivering the curriculum, keeping the courses examination-based, preparing the students for examinations only, and awarding degrees cannot make this discipline competitive at all in the current employment market. Courses need to be first intellectually rigorous, and then they should be reality, problem and context oriented. As well as, teaching methods, pedagogical practices need to be reformed in line with innovations that are eventuating elsewhere. Student-led curriculums, increasing leadership capability and power of eloquence and articulation in students through presentations in seminars, making philosophy more accessible and more interesting to students through shedding off its current recondite nature, writing books and texts in intelligible language may make philosophy a student-friendly and reality oriented discipline.

Notably, recently Dhaka University has decided to open a centre called Centre for Moral Development under the aegis of its Philosophy Department (DU to open Centre for Moral Development, Daily Star, May 22, 2009). Its objectives are to train professionals in the nuances of ethical and moral aspects that affect Bangladesh society currently beset with such vicious practices as corruption, crime and injustice. The Centre will hold seminars on moral issues, in addition to conducting courses in the evening shift. First of its kind in Bangladesh universities, such an initiative is really a move forward in reforming a theoretical discipline like philosophy to make it practical and job-oriented.

## 7.1.5 History

Despite its absence of immediate usefulness in economic terms, Stearns (1998, np) stresses that history ought to be “studied because it is essential to individuals and to society.” It helps explore and understand human nature as well as the complex socio-cultural, religio-political dynamisms that influence society and its workings. In this respect, Stearns (1998, np) considers history “however imperfectly ... our laboratory” that supplies us with “data from the past” which we can use “as our most vital evidence in the unavoidable quest to figure out why our complex species behaves as it does in societal settings.” It provides us with a reliable knowledge “base for the contemplation and analysis of how societies function”, and “this, fundamentally, is why we cannot stay away from history” (ibid).

In the above context, Spiegel (2008) justifies the study of history and the study of humanities as a whole on the ground that it is needed for the “enlightenment of ... ‘the public mind’.” Through an understanding of national, cross-national as well as cross-cultural issues and their different perspectives which require a proper knowledge of the historical habits of mind we can solve different socio-cultural, political and ethnico-religious problems. As Spiegel (2008) claims, it is the time that demands understanding humanity on a ‘new basis’. Referring to the merits or demerits of going to Iraq war, she says: “... it is palpably true that we entered into it without fully comprehending the character of the country, the varieties of its religious convictions and political philosophies. ... The exercise of power without a sense of ethical responsibility is dangerous; the exercise of power without historical knowledge is a prescription for disaster.” This justifies the “case for historical and humanistic study ” as it enables us to “address the growing needs of the contemporary world for historical, linguistic, and cultural competencies” (Spiegel 2008, np).

History is instrumental in social transformation. In society while changes are inescapable, the very dynamics of such changes are random or often unpredictable. It is “[o]nly through studying history can we grasp how things change; only through history can we begin to comprehend the factors that cause change; and only through history can we understand what elements of an institution or a society persist despite change” (Stearns 1998, np). In some countries historians (the *Annales* school in France, for example) acted as forerunners in intellectual change by exploring ‘*mentalites*’ (Macintyre 1998, p. 142).

History well told or dramatized can satiate our aesthetic pleasure and can act as a conduit for entertainment. When it is treated this way, it assumes an artistic and literary dimension and arouses in us a sense of awe, wonder, excitement and bewilderment. History with its knowledge and sense of extreme remoteness helps us immerse in the past “far removed from immediate, present-day utility. Exploring what historians sometimes call the ‘pastness of the past’—the ways people in distant ages constructed their lives—involves a sense of beauty and excitement, and ultimately another perspective on human life and society” (Stearns 1998, np). Biography and military history often assume the dimension of historical romance and that is one reason biography and history channels on TV are gaining popularity nowadays.

History acts as a moral exemplar or instructor – it teaches by example and elevates human sense of moral high ground. It tells stories that truly occur in real human situations, and heroes or villains of such true stories pit themselves against different insurmountable situations and strive to make do with their earthly existence. Their saga of courage, resilience as well as stories of blunders, follies and foibles help students learn lessons either of moral high ground or degeneration, either of courage or cowardice. And the pages of history are the best sources to provide us with insights into human characters with their highest moral standing or abysmal depredation. As to history’s importance as a moral exemplar, what Plutarch (c46AD-c120AD) writes in his *Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans* appears to be pertinent: “I avail myself of history as a mirror from which I learn to adjust and regulate my conduct. ... it is like living and conversing with ... illustrious men when I ... receive them, as it were, ... under my roof; ... I fill my mind with the sublime images of the best and greatest men, by attention to history and biography...” (Cited in Malouf 1996, pp. 7-8).

Apart from comprehending society in its mere abstraction, history as a discipline plays a significant role in understanding empirically based social issues such as drug addiction and alcoholism. While the sciences have contributed to identifying genetic predispositions for such problems, the problems as looked into in historical and social perspectives owe much to history in identifying trends and ways to tackle them.

History students are expected to acquire excellent research skills as researching historical data is at the very core of studying history. It involves “an iterative probing of issues”, gathering and analysing evidence to deal with open-ended issues. It requires an ability to deal with ambiguity and contradictory facts, and only historians have developed a body of research and analytical practices that allow them to deal with issues at a substantive level. And through such exercises they can acquire basic writing and communication skills. Also,

they are equipped with two vital ‘assets’ – historical methodology and knowledge of specific subject matter (Stearns 1998; also, Spiegel 2008).

Macintyre (1998) refers to the paradigmatic shifts history scholarship has recently undergone. Interaction between history and other humanities disciplines as well as studying history in comparative perspective is on the increase. In the wider world context, while there has been a destabilization of the humanities as a whole, the discipline of history has gained strength in certain respect: “Scholars of literature, art, society and culture draw on the work of historians. Historians have applied the new ways of reading texts to enrich their own work.” (Macintyre 1998, p. 144). Similarly, such other newer sub-disciplines as gender history, cultural history and sports history nowadays increasingly cooperate with history or work within history departments or they work together in an interdisciplinary context prompting historians to be as conversant in such disciplines as the practitioners of these disciplines are to be proficient in history.

### **7.1.5.1 Public history**

As part of further paradigmatic shift in history, public history emerged in the USA in the 1970s as a sequel to professionalizing academic history in the face of depleting academic jobs for mainstream history graduates. Historians took into consideration such a dearth of professional careers and job placements in their field and wanted to widen the non-academic job possibilities for graduates, and public or applied history was part of the natural disciplinary expansion (Bernstein *et al* 1998; also, Weible 2008 ). Weible rightly points out that such expanded public history programs have been instrumental in revitalising a profession in danger of becoming overly self-occupied and even irrelevant. Public history, as Miller (2004) argues, puts emphasis on public understanding as to the worth of heritage resources, both cultural and natural, as well as on the need to preserve these resources. As a sub-branch of academic history, it is practical and applied; it entails “the collaborative study and practice of history” (Wilmer, nd). The American Historical Association (AHA) identifies a number of applied characteristics in public history:

- Public programming such as exhibitions, tours, etc. in museums and other cultural and educational institutions;
- Consulting ... ;
- contract research on policy formulation and policy outcomes ;

- participation in film and other media projects;
- writing and compiling institutional and other histories;
- historic preservation and cultural resource management;
- administration and management of historical organizations and institutions;
- archival administration and the creation of bibliographies and databases;
- Professional service – editing journals and newsletters, organizing scholarly meetings, etc. (AHA 1993, np).

Cortada (2000, p. 835) explores the huge employment prospect for public or applied historians in business, government, and corporate sector as there is an increased “demand ... for applying historical insights.” He elaborates how informed knowledge of and historical insight into successful business practices can assist business executives, government officials, and others in adopting effective policy decisions. Also, historians can extend their research to other allied fields, and write (as Cortada himself, despite his specialization in European history, has written) books on the history of business and management of information technology. Such practices have brought history to larger audiences; and through his prolific writings on the history of corporations, management practices, and business strategy and similar public history-related topics Alfred D Chandler Jr, the noted Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard historian, has immensely enhanced his following among American business managers. And case studies (also termed as ‘little histories’) are another area where historians are increasingly taking interest, and business managers put emphasis on case studies as they think that past happenings may influence current situations. The result of case studies can help business managers formulate sound policy whose efficacy has already been established in other business fields through practical implementation.

Such interest diversifying exercises have explicit advantages as linkages with the “the needs of business ... stimulate additional interest and support for specific subfields of history such as the history of business, labor, economics” (Cortada 2000, p. 835). Mainstream historians have extended their traditional frontiers, and nowadays economic historians study price waves, political historians examine “recurring phases of war”, social historians identify “demographic patterns” by conducting generation studies (ibid). Their respective works may at times help “sound the alarm bells of change” through making predictions as well as cataloguing “trigger events” (ibid). For example, ‘seminal’ case studies, conducted in 1986 by Richard E Neustadt and Ernest R May, “demonstrated how historical and cultural knowledge in Cuban and Iranian affairs sensitized senior American officials to what had

worked in the past and what was probably on the minds of officials in opposing countries. Foreign offices routinely teach their diplomats history for the same reason and keep experts at the ready to inform senior government officials about the past and potentialities of an international situation” (Cortada 2000, p. 835).

In the USA, historical studies have entered other hitherto uncharted arenas, and consulting firms involved in historical research are doing brisk business. The History Factory and Winthrop Group, as for example, are history consultancy firms that run historical research projects on complex business problems or write corporate histories. Journalists, researchers, and consultants “conduct historical research, draw conclusions, make recommendations, and sell their studies, and executives act on their advice” (ibid). Many firms, including IBM, carry on research with some degree of historical perspective and publish scholarly monographs on history that deal with computing and telecommunications. Such monographs written with historical perspectives are highly popular with the computer industry. Historians can make inroad into such field with increased participation.

Doyle (2006) suggests that in order to enhance employability, history students finishing undergraduate courses in pure history should consider studying public history at graduate level. Or they can seek admission to such fields as military and diplomatic history, local history, architectural history, business history, legal history. Oral historians with an orientation to or aptitudes for electronic media may find job in the media sector. Students interested in museum careers should be able to work with objects and images, to conduct archival research, and familiarise themselves with the literature and methodology of scholars in museum studies and visual studies. They may consider working as librarian or archivist as well.

Many academics in the field believe the success of history as a discipline in the current context depends on their ability to innovate courses based on students’ demand or interest. In introducing new courses, the universities may take into consideration their immediacy of contextual interest mainly in terms of place or location. Course innovations based on such strategies may rejuvenate in students enthusiasm to study history. Also, as Barker (1997) believes, the newness of a course by having been not offered previously can arouse interest in students. He cites examples of three new courses –history of London (University of North London), Introduction to Environmental History (University of Sterling) and history of

gardens (the University of Northumbria). The very nature of these courses indicates that in introducing these courses, the universities seem to have considered their newness as well as contextual proximity.

Alongside students' interest and demand, the course's employability should also be taken into consideration, and to this end Trinity All Saints University College, Leeds, packages history courses with management and media and offer them as joint degrees (Barker 1997). Similar specially designed joint courses for history professionals incorporating history with computing or information technology are on offer at the University of North London, Warwick University and Worcester College of Higher Education. Also, Barker (1997) refers to a current trend that may apply across the board to all humanities disciplines, including history, and it is students' pursuing postgraduate education, preferably in any professional field. A history graduate's employability also depends on the prestige of the institutions he/she takes the degree from. A first degree from a less prestigious degree may require a Masters from another more prestigious university in order for it to be employable.

As a profession history is 'flunking'; or it has been marginalized prompting such questions as "Is History History?" (Jackson 2002, p. 1302). Judging from the decreasing enrolment patterns, fewer job openings in academe are resulting in higher unemployment of history graduates, even PhDs. Jackson paints a very dismal scenario, and as he thinks, the profession of history has grown warped, rigid or 'ossified', and is helplessly watching its own annihilation from the academic world. To some, it has become an endangered species or is in 'crisis'. As a remedial measure, Jackson (2002) makes a prognosis: history has to be made lively and interesting to students by freeing it from mere names and dates as well as by making it a means of understanding the world; and this objective can be accomplished by teachers who are endowed with imagination and creativity. Also, the literary as well as aesthetic elements of history need to be emphasized, and historian-turned-writers may advance the cause of history by being lucid and vivid in their prose style instead of the current proclivity to be 'convoluted'. They can enhance the appeal and importance of history by presenting "all the romance, drama, danger, excitement, and pathos in life itself" in skilful, compelling, and engaging prose that "can sustain student interest, providing narrative structure, new information, and argumentation in a way that makes reading seem effortless" (Jackson 2002, p. 1313; also, Mitchell 2007). Above all, cooperation, collaboration, interconnectedness among all – teachers of history at schools, professors at colleges and universities as well as students and history buffs – need to be established.

Australia's Monash University, for example, currently has a robust public history program which universities in Bangladesh can adopt and replicate because of its practical utility and innovative course contents. Its public history program consists of courses such as Graduate Diploma in Public History and Master in Public History. Applied as well as vocational in nature, both courses, as the University's website puts it, are designed to help historians and related professionals improve career prospects. The programs offer a vast array of units, both core and elective, and some of them are History and Heritage, History and the Museum, Family History and Genealogy, Local and Community History, Reading and Writing Australian History, Images of the Natural World: Issues in Environmental History, History and Memory: Oral history, Life Stories and Commemoration, Reading and Writing Biography and Life Stories, Recording Oral history: Theory and Practice, History, Biography and Autobiography. Some of the courses have practical bias towards writing, and if properly implemented such a competency can, to a great extent, enhance students' chances of employment outside their own disciplinary jurisdiction.

### **7.1.5.2 History at Dhaka University**

History is one of Dhaka University's foundation departments. Currently, it offers four-year Honours and one year MA programs. The Honours program, as evident from the course offerings, is broad in nature and covers almost all the major regions and eras. In Bangladesh context, it is normally called general history, and typically it has attempted to be general, instead of being specific, in its covering of the world history. With respect to covering topics, some of the courses are articulated in nature and presented in their fuller perspectives as well as treated without any disjunction in their continuity. In other words, the courses have been presented without any deviation from history department's traditional paradigm. This means no weakening of disciplinary boundaries, a trend taking hold in many western universities in the form of transdisciplinarity. Sticking to the older paradigm has its advantages as it allows teaching and research within the "assumed stable boundaries of knowledge" and takes "as its object the training of practitioners within the conventions of the discipline, which validate[s] research in peer assessment" (Macintyre 1998, p. 140).

The allegiance to older disciplinary paradigm is not without drawbacks. To base teaching and research purely on established disciplinary hierarchy means bypassing change. It also means not welcoming collaboration with other fields and disciplines. In the postcolonial world academic disciplines' assumption of 'universality' suffered serious setback when the

decolonized societies questioned western supremacy as well as rejected hierarchies of status and authority. Due to such challenges which were “at once political, ideological and intellectual” in nature, “new bodies of historical knowledge – postcolonial and indigenous history social history, ‘history from below’, women’s history” – have been produced (ibid). By adhering to the established disciplinary paradigm, the Honours and Masters history programs at Dhaka University have deprived themselves of the newer bodies of knowledge that have sprung in the new world order. It is quite evident from the way the Dhaka University history programs have failed to respond to the recent changes in the field. The curriculum has not shifted from its age-old paradigm at all. There is no sign of professionalizing the curriculum to equip graduates with skills that are in demand outside the academic profession.

The MA in History is, again, theory-based and covers such areas as historiography, Bengal in wider its socio-cultural and economic perspectives, South East Asia and some topics on international history. Noticeably, the program is purely traditional without any conscious attempt to make it professionalised through inclusion of courses that are applied in nature.

### **7.1.6 Islamic History and Culture**

At Dhaka University, as at many other general universities in Bangladesh, Islamic History and Culture constitutes a separate department. In Bangladesh, a predominantly Muslim country, this course dealing with Muslim identity (notably, Dhaka University was founded primarily to cater to the intellectual needs and aspirations of the Muslim populace) in the region and further afield naturally deserves special and separate consideration. It is designed to incorporate different phases of Islamic history along with geographical particularities, special importance being placed on the Indian subcontinent.

The Department, in line with the other departments at Dhaka University and other public universities in Bangladesh, offers four-year Honours and one year MA programs. A close scrutiny of the course contents reveals that this Honours program has some serious shortcomings. Its structure is monolithic and excludes comparative perspectives with other religion-based civilizations. The history of Muslim Bangladesh is closely entwined with Hindu India, and despite this fact history of Hinduism or Hindu culture does not even get a peripheral mention in the course curriculum. As we have seen above, studying history in comparative as well as cross-cultural perspective gives this discipline greater depth and

dimension. Also, treating the subject in such a newer perspective can help cross-cultural understanding at a time when the Muslim world needs to build a civilizational bridge with different religious communities.

Although the program has encompassed almost all the periods, geographical territories, dynasties and empires of the Islamic world since the early days of Islam, the course is, again, too traditional. It has a one-dimensional focus, mainly the political dimension of Islam. It looks like it is too traditional and lacks diversification. However some courses add diversity to the program as a whole. While the core courses deal monotonously with different political aspects of the Muslim world, some elective courses help students familiarize themselves with history outside the Muslim regions. Also, they are able to acquaint students with issues that are of current socio-cultural importance in the Muslim countries. As for example, the courses 409(B) Women and Islam, 402(B) Islam and Globalization, 303(B) Muslim Minorities in the Contemporary World, (410) Islam in Modern World have the potential to help student get clear understanding of burning issues that are affecting the life of Muslims in the modern world. The course 302 History of modern Europe (Renaissance to 1945), in addition to dealing with the political history of Europe, explores some landmark historical developments in Europe such as the Reformation, the European Renaissance, the Enlightenment Movement, the Industrial Revolution, and the French Revolution. These events that facilitated the emergence of the secular West can bring about significant transformation in the perspective or world view of Muslim students who normally lack exposure to the secular European civilization.

### **7.1.6.1 Reforming History and Islamic History**

Although in terms of covering topics and themes history and Islamic history have breadth, it appears that they have not undergone any reforms to make them oriented to the current job market situations. In Bangladesh, history graduates have very limited job opportunities. The bulk of the graduates vie for teaching positions in private and public colleges that have limited openings. As a result, either they go unemployed or try, at times in vain, to get jobs in other areas. General perceptions about their worth in the job market are very bleak. Besides, it is a fact that students with low academic results or of low calibre choose to study such courses, and this precludes their competitiveness in the job market as well as with the employers. The following suggestions may help bolster job prospects for the students of both history and Islamic history:

Knowledge of history is useful; however, such knowledge remains merely academic so long it is not reconfigured through conscious curriculum reform or innovation to fulfil practical needs. To make history useful, it needs to be studied more in cross-cultural and cross-national perspectives than as chronicling facts and events of countries severally. Courses should be designed in such a way as to enable students and scholars to understand national mind and psyche, especially from politico-religious and cultural points of view. Knowledge of any country or society has its inherent intellectual value; however, when such knowledge is purposive or reconfigured to solve socio-political problem in cross-national situation it can achieve new utilitarian dimensions. Also, as history has a transformational role, its courses may be selectively offered on the basis of events and incidents that have acted as agents of change in different phases of history. History's transformational role can be more profitably utilized by incorporating in history curriculums movements and events such as the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment movement. Such curriculum reforms can be initiated in two ways – by clustering such events together in units and offering them as part of mainstream history courses or offering them as single units in conjunction with non-history courses.

Exploring the literary values of history has a real possibility to enhance its utility. While biographical history with its emphasis on personality can expand the sphere of history, biographies written by historians can increase the economic prospect of their profession. Courses designed to train students in the art of writing historical biographies will help students in two vital ways – their job prospects will extend to a new area and they will acquire the skills of writing as well as negotiating language which is considered an important qualification in students of any disciplines. If history students, normally considered unemployable, study language and literature in conjunction with their major, they may overcome their disciplinary insularity and can increase their employment prospects. While studying literature itself is an important choice by students, for history students who want to build a career in writing in general, writing biography in particular, can utilize their skills in literature and language. However, history's success in writing biography depends greatly on how such a disciplinary arrangement is made in the curriculum. Again, the prime focus should be on training students in the art of writing alongside imparting knowledge of history. This objective can be better achieved by offering history courses in conjunction with literature as a minor and vice versa.

Also, for history to be able to act as exemplar, its courses can be redesigned in an innovative way. Such courses or units as entitled 'Lessons from History', 'Imitable lives and Personalities', 'Movers and Shakers in History', 'Personalities and Fallibilities' may be designed and offered with the explicit curriculum objectives of teaching students about the lessons of history. Such courses may be offered to non-history majors, too, such as international relations, diplomacy, strategic studies.

History students are mainly expected to learn research skills through happy coincidence or as mere by-products of disciplinary knowledge. However, this specific skill can also be imparted or whetted through conscious curriculum planning and design. Some history courses, because of their disciplinary nature and subject-specific contents, involve intellectual rigours and handling of data and materials that are able to hone research skills. Ancient manuscript studies, epigraphy, papyrology, study of ancient coins, although look archaic, require special aptitudes and intellectual discipline and perseverance that can train, develop as well as perfect students' research skills.

Any paradigm shift as well as extending disciplinary reach into other allied or cognate fields is really a boon both for the disciplines themselves and the wider horizon of knowledge. However, if such expansion is simply quantitative neither of such purposes is served. It will rather become a burden on students and course and curriculum planners may either ignore them or cobble them up in the curriculum simply to enlarge their offerings. Paradigmatic shifts and collaboration between disciplines meant to bring about intellectual enrichment as well as meet utilitarian demand can really have impact in academe. However, disciplinary branching-off without conscious planning may even weaken traditional disciplinary parameters. Sports history may become a part of sports science as medical history is already a sub-discipline of medicine. Although such expansion is not without benefits, it is true that the humanities will derive little utilitarian benefit from such expansion. History is a mainstream humanities discipline and in order for it to advance the cause of the humanities any paradigmatic shifts need to target intellectual and utilitarian benefit for the humanities discipline itself. It is possible to achieve this target by effecting a marriage of convenience with other disciplines that have tangible and economic value and by making them subservient to the humanities. History, nay any humanities disciplines, should team up with disciplines that are compatible intellectually with history and can enhance the utilitarian value of the latter. In this case history can ally with literature, cultural studies, with a special emphasis on the development of linguistic and writing skills.

The History Departments at Dhaka should also strive to professionalize their disciplines in line with the curriculum patterns and pedagogical practice of public history which is applied, collaborative as well as relies on non-traditional methods. Although public history emerged in the USA in the context of and in conformity with its socio-economic needs, knowledge of this new discipline can be successfully exploited to enhance the employment and professional value of history in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is rich in heritage resources – both natural and historical or cultural – whose historical, cultural and touristic relevance and value mainly remain unnoticed, unutilized and unexploited. For lack of professional management and utilization the country and its vast cultured citizenry cannot benefit from their cultural and economic exploitation. Universities in Bangladesh can introduce public history in their curriculums with particular emphasis on heritage management. Or heritage management courses can be offered independently along with a focus on business and managerial skills and strategies. History graduates with such a combination of skills will be able to attract employers from diverse categories. Public historians specializing in business and corporate history, economic history, social and cultural history can significantly increase their employment opportunities as business managers, policy makers in both business and public organizations and in consultancy.

History graduates can enhance their job prospects by doing postgraduate courses such as diploma or MA in applied or general history. Instead of offering courses in traditional fields that are nothing but mere extension of the undergraduate courses, history departments in Bangladesh can offer postgraduate courses in such applied history fields as local history, community history (history of indigenous people in the Hill Tracts), history of culture (local or cross-national), economic history, political history, history of the city (such as history of Dhaka city), regional history (history of Sylhet region), social history, history of saints and shrines, biographical/ life history (national leaders such as Bangladesh's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman), business history (successful businesspeople such as Bill Gate and their business success stories and strategies), history of Bangladesh War of Independence, area studies, history of science and technology, history of university/higher education, and so on. Notably, most of these or similar courses are offered in British universities. (see *Postgraduate History in History Today*, Volume 50, Issue 2, 2000). Despite such trends that are in vogue in many prestigious universities such as Oxford, history departments in Bangladesh simply recycle courses that have been in offer for centuries. Such courses have a number of advantages – they are interest driven, career focused, localized, contextualized, creative, and innovative.

Writing local history, business and corporate history, history of organizations and institutions can be a profitable profession for history graduates. They can either be employed by big businesses or become self-employed or work as consultants. Courses with greater focus on writing and researching skills can equip them with appropriate qualifications useful in their own right as well as for employment purposes. In Bangladesh, readership of newspapers and viewers of private TV programs are on the rise phenomenally. Media de-regulation policies have helped establish a good number of private TV channels that make and telecast documentaries on popular and local history very often. History students trained in community history, oral history, biographical history have the possibility to work at such TV and related media establishments. Course contents of such public or applied history can increase its graduates' employability if the former attaches greater importance on presentation, writing, linguistic and oral communication skills.

There should be innovation in pedagogical practice with a wider focus on creativity, analytical skills, writing skills, conducting research, and the current propensity to the acquisition of facts or simply memorising dates and event should be discarded. History should be popularized and the public should be made aware of its presence through increasing promotional activities undertaken by the existing historical organizations or establishing more history-related organizations. Teaching history at schools was once highly valued and popular; incorporating history in school curriculums and making history teaching mandatory by history graduates can increase their employability. History departments at the universities in Bangladesh are generally considered dumping ground for intellectual leftovers and the current pedagogical practices that ignore intellectual rigours encourage admission of students without appropriate intellectual levels. Improved pedagogical requirements that call for intellectual rigours and higher mental and intellectual ability may help restrict the supply of history graduates in the employment market. Above all, history departments need to collaborate with other allied but employable disciplines. The very nature of history as a discipline requires of its graduates high level literacy and language skills and in establishing disciplinary alliance such factors should be taken into consideration.

### 7.1.7 Islamic Studies

Islamic Studies as an academic discipline was established in 1921. Currently, the Islamic Studies Department offers BA Honours and MA degrees by course work. The rationale behind having a separate department offering courses in Islamic Studies is easily discernible. Being a predominantly Muslim country, Bangladesh is greatly influenced by Islam in its socio-political, moral, and cultural domain. As well as this department acts as prime venue for higher education for students who graduate from *madradas*.

The course structure of Islamic Studies, needless to mention, is tilted towards Islam-related fields – Arabic, Islamic culture, Quranic interpretation. Some Courses that include Islamic law and jurisprudence, Islamic finance and banking, Islamic economics have practical focus. Also, the Department seems to be aware of employable skills as it has incorporated in its Honours syllabus two courses entitled Computer Literacy (Codes: 306, 403, respectively). Courses such as modern Muslim history, political science, sociology, anthropology, international relations in Islamic perspectives tend to give the Honours course an interdisciplinary dimension. The courses on foundation English and Bengali aim at improving literacy of students whose *madrassa* background fail to equip them with appropriate linguistic skills both in Bengali and English.

Although the course syllabus and its contents look encouraging, in reality students of Islamic studies face tough employment competition from mainstream university students. The students' poor literacy, hidebound socio-religious outlook, low intellectual and academic prestige the Department itself enjoys make them virtually an intellectual underclass in society and uncompetitive in the job market (Ahmed & Ahmed 2004; also Uddin 2009). Such intellectual and social stigma can be corrected by undertaking the following measures:

Islamic economics, banking, finance and insurance are gaining popularity in Bangladesh and other Muslim countries. Bangladesh itself has a good market for Islamic finance and banking and there are a number of Islamic banks functioning and doing brisk business in the country. The courses offered in Islamic banking are in fragmented forms; once they are coupled with modern banking and accounting practices, students can augment their job skills and prospects. Along with their poor literacy, their numeracy skill is considered abysmally low as they have little exposure to mathematics and related disciplines during their early schoolings. Notably, students from these religious colleges have been barred from at least eight

departments of the University on grounds of poor literacy as well as numeracy and lack of exposure to scientific methodology ('Supreme Court clears way to hold DU Admission Test', The Daily Star, November 19, 2009, Dhaka, Bangladesh). Courses designed to improve their literacy and numeracy can go a long way to improve their job skills.

Although Bangladesh's legal system is predominantly secular and based on British common law, law of inheritance and family law are influenced by Islamic practices. Islamic studies graduates with greater orientation towards secular common law can make good family lawyers, marriage registrars, marriage celebrants whose demands are considerable in the country. Some courses on common law dealing selectively with family laws and acts may orient the students towards the aforementioned jobs and skills. Also, such courses may encourage them to train in the mainstream legal profession which is considerably lucrative as well as carries social and professional dignity. Notably, students from the *madrassa* stream, because of their practice and exposure to religious preaching and sermonizing, are very good at public speaking, verbal communication, interpersonal skills which they can effectively use in the legal profession. As well as if such skills are further honed through academic training in modern public relations and communication fields, they can improve their job prospects in different organizations and work as public relations personnel. Needless to say, they will require appropriate literacy in Bengali and English to flourish in such professions.

The Islamic Studies Department at Dhaka University is tilted more towards Islam as a religion. It can really be given a more interdisciplinary look by incorporating in it the socio-political, cultural and linguistic aspects the Muslim world. Its focus is mainly on Arabic and the Middle East. The current Muslim world with its socio-cultural and linguistic diversities can be explored with the conscious objectives of cooperation and understanding among the Islamic countries. As well as the course contents may be selected keeping Bangladesh's politico-economic interest and relations *vis-a-vis* other Muslim countries. In this regard, the objectives of the Islamic Studies course offered at The Centre for Arab & Islamic Studies, Australian National University (ANU), may act as a guide: "The Centre integrates the study of Middle Eastern and Central Asian contemporary politics, history, culture, political economy, economics, and the religion of Islam within the broader framework of the changing global order. The Centre fosters the study of the region's most relevant languages of Arabic, Persian and Turkish. It also focuses on issues pertinent to Australia's interests in, and the development of its commercial, scientific and industrial ties with, its areas of coverage." (ANU Website).

## 7.2 The Pass BA under the National University

The BA Pass degree (along with Pass BSc and BCom) in Bangladesh has a long tradition that dates back to the founding of Srirampur College (1815) and Calcutta Hindu College (1817). In 1857 when Calcutta University was established initially as an affiliating university, the Pass degree was its mainstay. In Bangladesh from 1947 until 1992, the Pass BA, BSc and BCom were under three general universities – Dhaka, Rajshahi and Chitagong. In the same year the National University was established as an affiliating body and the Pass BA (also, Pass BSc and BCom) came under its jurisdiction. Now, this purely affiliating university offers a three-year BA Pass degree and its course structure is as follows:

It consists of 1400 marks – two compulsory subjects (Bengali and English) carrying 100 marks each. Besides, students are to study three elective subjects each consisting of four papers, each paper carrying 100 marks. Students are required to take three subjects from the following clusters; however, no one can take more than one subject from each cluster:

**Cluster A:**

Bengali (Advanced)/ English (Advanced)/ Sanskrit/ Arabic/ Pali.

**Cluster B:**

History/ Islamic History and Culture

**Cluster C:**

Philosophy/ Geography/ Library Science and Information Technology/ Home Economics

**Cluster D:**

Economics/ Sociology/ Social Work/ Political Science

**Cluster E:**

Mathematics/ Statistics/ Psychology/ Islamic Studies  
(Source: National University BA Pass syllabus).

As evident, the Pass BA program is generalist and interdisciplinary in nature, and students can take, in addition to purely humanities courses, courses from such other disciplines as Social Sciences (Cluster D) and Science (Mathematics/ Statistics/ Psychology/ Geography).

The above clustering seems to have arranged without any conscious effort to make the course employable and really interdisciplinary. As in most cases course planners in Bangladesh formulate curriculum and syllabus on their instincts either as students (while they were students themselves) or as teachers. That education needs to be job oriented (most Pass students come to the Course with employment expectations in mind) does not figure at all in their thoughts. It has a lot of lacunae which can make the Course a futile exercise other than giving them some exposure to tertiary education in name.

A close scrutiny reveals that if students choose Math/Statistics from Cluster E and Economics from Cluster D, and Library Science and Information Technology Cluster C, for example, the course achieves some interdisciplinary look and students can get exposure to courses that can make them employable. Also, Social Work in combination with two humanities courses can give it an interdisciplinary format as well as professional orientation. However, the weakest point is that the courses from social sciences and Science streams can be skipped by students because of their optional nature and also because of the way courses have been clustered. In that case, students can graduate with little interdisciplinary knowledge or exposure and employable skills or expertise. As for example, if a student chooses Islamic Studies from Cluster D, she/he can ignore the other intellectually rigorous and demanding courses that have more tangible value for employment purposes. Also, students can completely ignore cluster D, which reduces the program to a mono-disciplinary one. The English elective is really worth studying for BA Pass students as it will increase their language skills and job prospects; however, this can be skipped by taking any of the other less rigorous courses from Cluster A.

Besides, there are serious constraints as to the colleges' capability to deliver some of the courses as these institutions, mainly those from rural areas, lack adequately qualified teachers and library facilities. As for example, rural colleges may not have qualified teachers for Elective English, or computer and other facilities for Library and Information Science. Ultimately the curriculum turns into a paper curriculum. As to the overall dearth of qualified teachers at affiliated colleges under the National University, What Huq (2002, p. 114) says is pertinent: "... most of the teachers in the affiliated colleges do not have higher degrees except Master's degree which is the required minimum for becoming a teacher in the affiliated colleges. Only a handful of the teaching staff hold Ph.D, M.Phil and Master's Degree from abroad." Huq (2002) delineates a much grimmer picture of the rural or non-metropolitan privately managed colleges in terms of their teaching staff both in quantity and

quality.

On scrutiny of individual courses and their curriculum contents it becomes evident that they are purely theoretical in nature. Let us look into some of the courses and their contents:

Bengali (Elective): The course structure is quite straightforward and it consists of poetry (Paper 1), short story (Paper 2), literary essay (Paper 3) and novel, drama, travel writing, literature in translation, aesthetics (Paper 4). No attempts are visible to make it employment-oriented by giving it any practical orientation. The Elective English is also designed exactly the same way keeping it purely literature oriented.

The History component is plagued with the same problems. It is purely theoretical and narrowly cobbles up together such units as history of Bengal, history of South Asia with a history of Europe. One paper on Islamic history is also added. Interestingly, no segment of Bangladesh history since 1971 is added, thus depriving it of contextual interest.

The Philosophy course includes Problems of Philosophy (Paper 1), Ethics (Paper 2), Muslim Philosophy or Indian Philosophy (Paper 3) and Bangladesh Philosophy (Paper 4). The first three papers are purely theoretical along with all the hallmarks of esotericism or reconditeness of any typical philosophy courses. The fourth paper (Bangladesh Philosophy) has some contextual relevance. The fourth paper has an alternative – Logic: Traditional and Symbolic, and this, too, is more abstract as well as more theoretical in nature.

As already mentioned, students who study the Pass BA course come from poor socio-economic backgrounds and their intellectual capability and motivation are quite different. The teaching delivery method at affiliated colleges is age-old and the assessment method is purely exam-based. Students' failure rate is very high; those who come out successful hardly acquire either disciplinary knowledge or any transferable skills which employers prefer. Consequently, their unemployment rate is very high. Huq blames outdated curriculums that remain out of touch with current trends eventuating in other countries: "This ... renders the students of the affiliated colleges 'non-competing' in the job market home and abroad." (Huq 2002, p. 119). The same analyst brings to light another glaring weakness of the curriculum – the National University designs a uniform curriculum for all the affiliated colleges, their number being around 1800 and scattered all over the country. The curriculum is designed according to a common format followed in public universities, and in this regard the

limitations of the colleges in terms of availability of teaching staff, teachers' academic credentials, students' academic and intellectual capability, the educational environment at the individual colleges are hardly taken into consideration. In order to make the BA Pass program in Bangladesh more relevant in terms of employability as well as socio-cultural and civic relevance, the following steps may be taken:

The current flexibility in terms of course offerings needs to be changed. Arrangements should be made so that students have to take at least a portion of the course from employment related fields. One of the courses on information technology, mathematics, statistics may be made compulsory or clustered together without any less rigorous courses such as Islamic Studies in this group. This arrangement will increase students' numeracy skills which employers in the current context prefer to disciplinary knowledge.

The very nature of the program and the students' intellectual level are an indication that students' job expectations should be, realistically speaking, limited to non-professional low paying blue-collar jobs (In Bangladesh, Pass graduates are barred from competing for Bangladesh Civil Service cadre jobs). They are most likely to work as teachers at primary, junior or at best lower secondary level, office secretaries or administrators, bank clerks, NGO workers. Their course curriculums may include practical courses such as secretarial sciences, office administration skills, book-keeping, computer literacy, NGO management or administration, mass literacy, non-formal education, to name a few. To prepare themselves for teaching jobs they need more literacy and numeracy skills than disciplinary knowledge, and this objective can be achieved by including more courses in English and Bengali. Notably, the UGC (2006) recommends putting emphasis on English from the very first year of university education. The current compulsory units on Bengali and English may be expanded by cutting discipline-based courses such as history, philosophy. As already mentioned, in absence of disciplinary or subject-matter knowledge, transferable generic skills may make humanities graduates more employable. To inculcate transferable generic skills in the students, there should be conscious curriculum reforms to this end. Course syllabus may put emphasis on writing skills; courses on debate and discussion as well as leadership courses can enhance their oral communication skills. The program should also put emphasis on enhancing their general intelligence and life skills that can be achieved through reforming the assessment system. More projects emphasizing independent work, critical analysis of local or contextual issues, placement can help enhance their life skills, analytical skills, creativity and general intelligence. As well as attitude and aptitude should get greater stress than intellectual

rigours or scholastic achievement. Student-centric teaching method or pedagogy such as active learning, close student-teacher interaction, lower student-teacher ratio, seminar type classes instead of the current lecture style classroom teaching may help change students' cloistered attitude and open up their mind. In view of all these factors, the Pass program in Bangladesh can also be reformed by following the general education paradigm that has previously been discussed.

The Pass BA students are intellectually mediocre and can hardly cope with the curriculum that is purely theoretical and abstract in nature. As they cannot handle abstract ideas, it becomes problematic to impart to them pure disciplinary knowledge. In such a situation, it is advisable that the curriculum be oriented more towards real-life situation involving solution of problems that they face in their everyday life. So, it should adopt the general education paradigm in its truest spirit; it should be problem oriented and geared towards solving life's everyday problems. While problem-solving should be the curriculum motto of all modes of higher education in the current world context, in case of BA Pass students this problem-solving function should have special objectives. It should aim at solving practical problems ordinary people face in their day-to-day existence. Pitted against higher and more serious problems of life and existence that call for subtle intellectual and sophisticated handling, the problems BA Pass graduates are supposed to manoeuvre are less subtle and less sophisticated and mainly require commonsense and average intelligence. In other words, this program should focus more on life skills and intelligence than on disciplinary knowledge or higher intellectual or scholastic ability and attributes.

The BA Pass program, in its current shape, is not interdisciplinary in keeping with the actual curriculum paradigm or ideals of general education. The way courses are clustered as well as offered simply makes them a cocktail of either some loosely knit or disparate courses without any explicit or implicit academic alliance or without connection between them that any academic program requires to gear it to problem-solving. In other words, the courses are arbitrarily arranged and not combined to form a coherent disciplinary alliance without any problem-solution mechanisms in sight that require a multi-pronged approach. In order for the program to be really problem-oriented, the courses should be rearranged so that they form real collaboration on the basis of both academic commonality as well as pragmatic curriculum arrangements. As for example, Bengali and English together have disciplinary interrelation and can improve literacy; when they are combined with mathematics or statistics, all of them come together to improve literacy and numeracy which employers value

in the current context. In the employment market of today academic programs that have little tangible value cannot survive without such conscious and at times imposed curriculum realignment.

As well as courses should be designed in the light of students' intellectual level. The overly theoretical nature of the program does preclude real dissemination of knowledge. Also, the courses that target theories and knowledge base with their root mainly in the West lack contextual orientation. While in many cases abstract theories cannot be avoided, their dominance may be reduced and practical application may receive preference. As for example, philosophy is presented purely in its abstract theoretical form. Its arcane nature and its contextual lacking or irrelevance makes it really abstruse to Pass students without any tangible benefits to them. When basic philosophical theories are applied to an understanding of everyday existence and its contingencies, they may lose their abstractness and assume application value.

According to popular perceptions, female BA Pass students have different motivations, and it is true many of them do not come to the program solely for job preparation or with clear-cut career aspirations. Many come for a degree that may enhance in society their worth as individuals; many take up this program as a way of increasing their worthiness as females or as brides in the marriage market (in Bangladesh most marriages are arranged) which is highly competitive. Alongside physical beauty, family background, parents' ability to afford dowry, education plays a vital role in making them eligible brides. In such cases, the course curriculum may put more focus on child-rearing skills, skills and attitudes required for conjugal harmony, family life and relationship, knowledge of literature, culture, musical skills that can make them more cultured, sophisticated and refined in manners and attitude. In this regard, developing attitudes as well as improving them should be the main focus of curriculum design and objectives that may help cope with other contingencies in life including being competitive in the job market. Notably, the curriculum modality articulated here is commensurate with the General Education Program being offered at James Madison University. The Program's Cluster V Unit Individual in the Human Community has almost identical course contents and objectives that consist in "providing an integrated exploration of human development, individual and community health and wellness, group and family dynamics, community development, social responsibility and change, conflict analysis and mediation, leadership and citizenship" (Abrahamson & Kimsey 2002, p. 590). Instead of stressing on pure intellectualism, it works on a curriculum 'philosophy' that targets

cultivating 'habits of mind' necessary for the functioning of a democratic society and its norms and values. Also, it aims at helping students appreciate beauty, understand the natural and social environment they are in and work towards building a promising future.

The Pass program's employability and applicability apart, it has considerable socio-political relevance in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh higher education is still highly selective as well as elitist in terms of access and its rate of participation is only four per cent (Sen 2008). Admission to public universities is restricted because of non-availability of seats; the public and private colleges under the National University can absorb only 20 per cent of the eligible secondary graduates for Honours courses. Naturally, a vast number of them remain left out of the mainstream higher education system. The Pass program, although beset with problems such as abysmally low quality, can offer them an avenue for tertiary education of some sort. Their absorption into the system ensures social justice, gives the system an egalitarian look and saves the country from socio-political dislocation or destabilization. As a US study shows, in that country the rich-poor gap is increasing as well as social mobility is becoming difficult because access of the poor to higher education is getting stymied owing to increased tuition fees and other imposed obstacles such as lack of government subvention (Wessel 2005; also Koretz 2003). Although the Pass graduates may not acquire disciplinary knowledge *per se*, they can have improved literacy, become empowered in terms of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society, become more conscious citizens of the country. To many students from socially and economically disadvantaged section of society, this could be the first ever experience with higher education that paves the way for social mobility and social egalitarianism. So, the Pass program, with its open admission policy and unrestricted access, is vital to maintaining social ecology in the country by dismantling elitism, ensuring access to the maximum numbers and bringing rural and underprivileged students to the fold of some sorts of tertiary education.

A problem-oriented curriculum that follows the general education paradigm has always its stated purpose or objectives. The National University curriculum does not fulfil this feature; it simply outlines the course contents or the aspects the courses are expected to focus on. It means the curriculum planners are not aware of their utility, either tangible or academic; they seem not to know what usefulness the courses are supposed to have or what problem-solution it is going to deal with. In the current world context curriculum objectives are an essential part of curriculum design that foresees the usefulness, be it intellectual or skill-based, the courses will be put to. Means, ends, methods and objectives require clear articulation. This

glaring lacuna in the Pass curriculum needs serious attention and requires to be filled if any real utility is the objective.

However, simply articulating curriculum objectives will not suffice; the curriculum should be problem-based; it should correspond students' intellectual ability that cannot handle abstract ideas; it should target making average fit men and women, not scholars and intelligentsia. As the BA Pass program caters to students' disparate needs and students are mostly from rural, tribal, coastal backgrounds, a localized curriculum targeting local issues may be introduced. Indigenous or tribal students may be acquainted, through curricular reforms, with their own issues and problems that affect their living as well as socio-economic and cultural practicalities and particularities; rural students may study different problems and prospects of country life; students from remote coastal areas and off-shore islands may study courses that deal with their fight against tsunamis, cyclones, tidal waves, salinity, and such other natural calamities that at times assume catastrophic proportion; city-based Pass students can study the problems of homelessness, drug addictions, juvenile crimes. Rampant corruption at different spheres of life, students' own problems such as campus violence or session jams receive little curriculum attention. Indeed, Bangladesh is a problem-ridden country and such problems are localized that require localized solution. Instead of burdening Pass BA students with too-much theory-based curriculums that include (for example, Aristotelian abstraction, deduction, induction), the proportion of courses based on tangible Bangladesh-related issues may get greater attention (notably, this problem-based and contextualized approach is in keeping with Huq's prescription that the courses offered at affiliated colleges need to focus more on problems which rural Bangladesh confronts [Huq 2002, p. 116]). Such issues based on local context will be easier for students with low intellectual ability to handle; also, they will acquire skills to deal with their own problems that affect their life and existence. Alongside the three-year BA program, associate diplomas/diplomas that are applied in nature can be offered in the affiliated colleges. Diploma/Associate diploma in Community Services (Childcare/ community welfare/ social welfare, social work, etc) may be one of such courses that are very popular in Australia and other western countries. These courses are problem-based and career oriented and popular with students who fail to get access to university undergraduate courses because of poor academic performance.

As attitude building and life-skills enhancement should be one of the objectives of the BA Pass program because of students' low intellectual ability, their attitudes and life-skills can be built through including creative arts courses in their curriculum. Courses on acting, drama

can be included for this purpose, and research conducted in Scotland reveals that those who study such courses as drama or music in conjunction with their main courses “appear to be most confident: confidence among those who studied drama was higher than for young people who did not study any arts subjects” (Marsh 2006, np). The same study confirms that “employability is generally higher “for those school leavers who had studied these “arts subjects” and are “less likely to find themselves in a negative labour market” (ibid). As this study confirms, it is more likely that drama students are from low socio-economic background, and in Bangladesh context this course may suit BA Pass students for their socio-economic barriers in terms of rural background, parents with no formal qualifications.

## **7.3 Reforms across the board**

Based on the analyses and the findings emanating from them, humanities education at the universities and other institutions of higher education in Bangladesh may undergo the following reforms across the board in order for it to be relevant:

### **7.3.1 Introducing and popularising research degrees**

Speaking academically, a serious lacuna in Dhaka University’s humanities curriculums is that all the Honours and MA programs are 100 per cent coursework-based and taught. None of them has any research components. It may be noted here that introducing a research component of at least 50 per cent at Masters level was recommended by the National Education Commission – 2003 (NEC 2003, p. 129; also, CNE, GOP 1961). As per this recommendation, all MA programs at Bangladesh universities may introduce a research component. If an MA by 100 per cent research cannot be made attractive or sustainable, at least its current one-year course work MA may include a mandatory research component of certain percentage. Education through research, an idea propagated by Humboldt, can prepare students for their public role in society. Researchers at the Commission of the European Communities have found it “very striking that the list of employability competences overlaps quite largely with the competences involved in the exercise of the modern research activity;” and hence they stress on an “employability-oriented higher education” which is research-based. (Simons S *et al* 2007, p. 399). Doing research, especially in the humanities, can hone students writing and editing skills “via the writing of conference papers and academic articles, extensive thesis drafting, and proofreading ...” (Barr, 1999, p. 47). Research at undergraduate level contributes to analytical and logical

thinking as well as synthesizing ideas and independent learning (Ishiyama, 2002). Also, what Macintyre ((1998, p. 143) says as to the importance of research for the history Honours Program at Australian universities is quite pertinent: “The Honours year experience remains the crucible of what some historians regard as distinctive qualities of their discipline: ‘the capacity to weigh and analyse data, to see wholes as well as parts, to notice the contingent as well as the determined in human affairs, to acknowledge the importance of values in their own work and that of others’.” Although this comment mainly applies to History Honours, it may cover across the board all other departments. The humanities departments at the universities in Bangladesh may heed Ishiyama’s as well as Macintyre’s prescription and introduce a research component in their Honours or Masters curriculums.

### **7.3.2 Professionalising postgraduate qualifications**

The current postgraduate courses at Dhaka and other Bangladesh Universities, mainly the MA program, have no professional orientation. The latter is simply an extension of the Honours or BA degrees and its course contents are not geared to the job-market needs. They are simply a quantitative expansion and are nothing but a rehash of the undergraduate courses with some wider focus or merely covering the ground more widely. As most undergraduate courses are disciplinary in nature and students are expected to gain knowledge in its linear forms, the MA program needs to be redesigned to give it a professional character or application orientation. This can also be done through offering postgraduate diploma, diploma, and certificate courses. At present, none of Dhaka University’s humanities departments offers diploma level professional courses. At the same time the MA program, following the British or US practice mentioned earlier, may be given professional character or where possible purely professional Masters can be offered. And this is more appropriate for the humanities disciplines as they have little focus on application and problem-solving at undergraduate stage. In this context, the undergraduate humanities courses may be treated, as they are done in the USA and Britain, as a preparation for professional training. As mentioned, applied philosophy, applied ethics, bioethics, public history, applied history are the potential areas in which postgraduate professional courses at diploma and Masters levels may be offered. Also, similar applied courses can be offered at linguistics and Bengali departments. Notably, many universities in the West have designed self-contained applied and practical courses in the humanities. The School of Arts and Humanities, Claremont Graduate University, offers several MA courses in Applied Humanities. For example, its Master of Arts Management (MAAM) has an obvious professional orientation as it combines

“management, policy and decision-making training with advanced study in the humanities” (University Website). Students who do this course have the prospects of working as arts and cultural managers, community leaders, cultural policy planners, educators, facilitators, and fund-raisers. It, as the Claremont’s website articulates, “strives to achieve the optimal balance of advanced study in arts and cultural theory, policy, management, and hands-on experience” (ibid).

### **7.3.3 Structural changes in the provision of courses**

University courses in Bangladesh have other glaring weaknesses. One is that the Honours program is not a terminal course and almost all graduates continue their education at Masters level; another is a lack of continuing education provision (Bangladesh Open University has this provision in a limited way; this is yet to gain popularity as well as credibility) that may allow students to change disciplines or go for more profession-oriented courses at postgraduate level. Once students discontinue their education after graduation, it becomes almost impossible for them to come back to studies later for such reasons as non-existence of mature-age entry, university regulations precluding their return to study after a lapse of certain years, stereotypical attitude or even stigma towards mature-age students. The result is not salubrious at all as it prevents upgrading skills, achieving newer skills required by the changing job-market. The universities in Bangladesh should correct this serious loophole in the higher education system and introduce provision for continuing education in all disciplines, especially in the humanities as graduates in these areas are ill-equipped for the job-market. However, continuing education in allied disciplines without any professional or applied focus will not fulfil the desired objectives. Postgraduate courses in education, business-related field, new humanities (such as culture and heritage management) that have professional bias, human resource management, public relations, communication studies may be offered as part of the continuing education program. Accredited courses in leadership training at certificate, diploma and Masters, with provision for early exit, may attract mature-age students given Bangladesh’s socio-political culture that calls for competent leadership trained both professionally and morally. The provision of continuing education at public universities may encourage students to terminate studies after Honours years and help save these universities from overcrowding as well as session jam. Notably, the Bangladeshi Nobel laureate Professor Yunus, in an address at the convocation ceremony of Dhaka University on February 28, 2007, touched on the importance of continuing education for mature-age students and recommended its introduction in Bangladesh universities (Shamakal

[a Bengali daily], Internet Edition, March 1, Dhaka, 2007). The BEC-2003 recommends introducing continuing education for the purpose of enhanced job prospects as well as employment-related skills.

### **7.3.4 Clustering of allied disciplines or interdisciplinarity**

The humanities can remain relevant through collaboration with other faculties at social, intellectual, and structural levels (Grand, 1999). Actually, interdisciplinarity as well as clustering of allied disciplines together is a more viable way of enhancing the relevance of the humanities; however, interdisciplinarity as a means of enhancing relevance with employment prospect in sight is yet to develop in Bangladesh universities. The current integrated Honours courses that require Honours students to study some elective courses outside their majors are nothing but a combination of some subjects loosely cobbled up, and the optional subjects do not aim at linking them to the majors as a conscious curriculum arrangement on the basis of their closeness in terms of course contents, disciplinary alliance or their employability. English language and literature, as a discipline, has greater employment prospects in Bangladesh, and other humanities departments can allow their students to take more courses from English departments than the current foundation course which is not enough to make students proficient in English. As well as the tradition of offering double/combined degrees (arts-law, science-arts) or tagged degrees (arts-media studies) is still an unheard of phenomenon in this country. Richards (1999, np) is of the view that “combined or tagged degrees have helped the growth in arts degrees. Such vocational ties help people link to professional areas they are interested in ... .” If double/combined or tagged degrees are introduced, the disadvantaged disciplines, especially the humanities, will benefit the most. So, the current Honours courses in the humanities may be offered in conjunction with English as double Honours. Also, double degrees in history, philosophy, linguistics, Bengali can be offered along with journalism, public administration, economics, international relations, mathematics, law, education as these courses have greater employment prospects and are suitable for humanities students because of their non-technical nature. In countries such as Australia, science, commerce and business programs are offered as double majors with the humanities. Notably, this program is very popular even with students obtaining highest scores at the secondary examination, and students obviously take double majors mainly out of employment concern. Also, universities in Australia or elsewhere offer this program as part of their conscious efforts to remain relevant in the job market or in the changing academic ambience that demands of students’ multidisciplinary

exposure. Recent research corroborates the benefits of double majors and the humanities graduates gain considerably from such disciplinary arrangements: “Most of the gains from having a double major come from choosing fields across two different major categories. Graduates who combine an arts, humanities or social science major with a major in business, engineering, science or math have returns 7–50% higher than graduates with a single major in arts, humanities or social science.” (Rossi & Joni 2008, p. 375). However, Fish (2003; also, Fish 2004) reminds us of an important drawback of interdisciplinarity which, as he considers it, should not loosely target or combine a number of disciplines to simply augment or enlarge breadth. To him, a discipline does not mean ‘everything else’; it should be marked by its ‘distinctiveness’, and equip them with, although at times narrowly and in mono-disciplinary mode, in-depth knowledge and skills that can prepare them for specific employment. Targeting multiple objectives with multidisciplinary focuses such as sharpening or broadening the mind, moral edification, character building, democratic values, changing the world – “everything under the sun” – will ultimately fail as the “task originally ... set out to perform will be lost sight of” (Fish 2003). By remaining focused or definitive, any educational ‘enterprise’ can secure both its sustenance and its usefulness. So, a discipline should not be added simply as an appendage if it is not distinctively and ‘plausibly’ qualified to provide a service or a product. Instead of sheer breadth in name only, the objective of disciplinary knowledge should primarily aim at “precise formulations of intellectual problems and their possible solutions” (ibid).

### **7.3. 5 Introducing area studies program**

Area studies program, an important disciplinary innovation, is yet to gain popularity in Bangladesh. Interdisciplinary in nature, this program can bring the humanities to the forefront of academic offerings and enhance their relevance as well as employment prospects. It can also enhance collaboration among the humanities, social sciences, and business disciplines. Area studies cuts across political science, cultural studies, history, language studies, business studies, and the dominant focus is on the humanities segments. This obviously enhances the value of the humanities. Courses on area studies such as South Asian studies, Middle Eastern studies, Central Asian studies can attract students because of their contextual importance in Bangladesh. Departments such as history, political science, international relations currently offer some courses at individual unit levels and simply cover the ground in a fragmented way. Offering them in tandem with each other as well as with business related courses that focus on understanding international business and linguistic

culture does really have the prospect of increasing their relevance in the academic as well employment arenas. Also, Bangladesh has to depend on manpower export to certain countries such as the Gulf countries, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, and area studies courses with special focus on language and culture of the region concerned may make prospective employees linguistically and culturally literate. Area studies with history and culture as lead disciplines can attain commercial prospects and, in this regard, Richards (1999, np) aptly says that such a combination is not “just intellectual. It also has a commercial consequence. If you cannot relate to other people, you will not be very successful.”

### **7.3.6 Numeracy and improved literacy**

As surveys conducted in Britain and elsewhere indicate, arts graduates are disadvantaged in the employment market for lack of appropriate numeracy. In case of Bangladesh this weakness in humanities graduates may also be corrected through interdisciplinary courses. Because of their different academic and intellectual background as well as cognitive ability it is not that easy to increase their numeracy skills. Advanced mathematics which science and technology related students study is too high in standard or difficult for humanities students; however, a specially designed general math or alternative math for non-science students at tertiary level, in line with the spirit of the current foundation courses in Bengali and English, may suit their mental ability and aptitude. Such other courses as economics, accounting that deal with figures and numeracy may be offered along with humanities disciplines. In some cases humanities students are allowed to study such courses; however, the optional nature of these course makes it possible for students to skip them, thereby defeating the actual purpose.

In Bangladesh, as different education commissions reports as well as newspaper statistics reveal, literacy is a big impediment to getting gainful jobs. What a recent newspaper report propounds as to the English language deficiency is discernible: “Academics have identified weakness in English as a major barrier to higher education in the country and called for effective government initiatives to overcome the problem. ... they pointed out that lack of proficiency in English among teachers and students has restricted themselves to cope with the rapid development in the arena of knowledge” (BSS 2009). This poses a real problem to humanities students as in absence of any tangible skills these graduates do not have expertise to offer their employers. High level of literacy, especially in English alongside the vernacular, can increase their job prospects as employers of all categories need scribes, clerks, and office administrators. Curriculums with greater focus on functional language with a particular stress on business correspondence, writing and communication skills, writing

office memo, writing and presenting tender documents, writing project proposals may improve their job skills. This is in keeping with what Arndt (2007) puts stresses on: there should be efforts to bring writing back to the core of curriculum and almost all courses should require at least some kind of writing. The current compulsory units in Bengali and English which all humanities students at tertiary level have to take may be consciously designed with these objectives in mind.

### **7.3.7 Focusing on generic skills and attitude building**

While making humanities graduates sufficiently as well as appropriately educated in disciplinary knowledge through intellectual rigours and fulfilling other conditionalities has its constraints and pitfalls, they can be made employable through imparting transferable generic skills. It can be done, as already seen, through targeting their attitudes, enhancing life-skills and general intelligence, improving their self-confidence, smartness in terms of personality, power of articulation, logical thinking, problem-solving skills, and so on. These attributes can be developed through conscious curriculum reforms. Studying logic and philosophy can enhance reasoning and logical skills that in turn help problem-solving as well as help get rid of socio-religious orthodoxy; studying language and literature can improve writing skills; courses on rhetoric, communication studies, public speaking, leadership, debate and discussion may improve power of articulation; presenting issues and problems of everyday life and asking to solve them using their commonsense may go a long way to enhance their general intelligence as well as problem-solving skills; smartness and personality can be developed through inculcating in them a knowledge of their immediate environment, current events and happenings, exposing them to different cultures and allowing them to interact with people in high places (they may include intellectuals, celebrities, philanthropists, successful businesspeople). To achieve all these is not that difficult provided that the institutions concerned have the will and appropriate policy-plans in place. Some of the above attributes develop exclusively through humanities disciplines, and once they are targeted through curriculum realignment, the humanities may become the core of many disciplines.

Arndt (2007, pp. 1-2) enumerates, on the authority of Plumb (1964), a number of charges that can be brought against the humanities, and important of these that may apply specifically to Bangladesh are: the humanities are economically useless; intellectually the work they produce is “narrow, trivial, and insular”; knowledge acquired through the humanities is

“adrift without any sense of common purpose”; the humanities “no longer center on the arts of language” and this aspect lowers academic writing and speech to a deplorable level; this “shift in focus away from the language arts has made study in the humanities more economically and vocationally useless.” The NEC 2003 also stresses on the latter shortcomings. As evident, the humanities are particularly important in that they are mainly writing, literacy and reading based. As Engell & Dangerfield (1998, np) puts it, by “virtue of the areas they encompass, the humanities have charge of literacy in undergraduate education. Their basic mission is to insure that recipients of the bachelor's degree can read and write critically, can reason in language, can argue, can persuade and be open to persuasion.” In the USA, even other non-humanities disciplines and their accreditation bodies such as the Association of American Law Schools put emphasis on “courses that stress reading, writing, speaking, critical and logical thinking” (ibid). Not only that law courses use literature and classics as the yardstick of their student selection process. It is clear from such evidences that the relevance of the humanities in Bangladesh can greatly be enhanced by introducing specially designed courses that aim at educating students in literacy and other related skills as core course adjectives. Fish’s (2003) prescription in this regard is worth-heeding. Acknowledging the efficacy of writing or composition as a course, he argues that limiting other course offerings to the bare minimum, more emphasis may be given to writing, composition, writing assignments, effective use of the language and its linguistic nuances including grammar. To quote Arndt (2007, p. 17) again in this regard: “We need to return writing to the center of the curriculum. Most courses in every subject should require at least some kind of writing. If we want students to become active and responsible citizens, we have to make sure they can participate intelligently in public debate. They will not learn to do this in one or two composition courses. In almost every course students have to write at least one paper.”

### **7.3.8 Redefining success as well as realigning relevance**

The relevance of the humanities in terms of social, intellectual, educational, and employment contexts can be enhanced once the term ‘relevance’ itself and other associated factors are redefined as well as realigned. Undoubtedly, the humanities cannot compete with such disciplines as science and technology on equal terms when their relevance is judged in terms of financial and professional success. By redefining success as well as realigning relevance to mean something useful or good in social, intellectual, or educational context, we can prove the worth of these intangible disciplines. The traditional notion of linking success to money or professional dignity discounts the value of education, be it humanities or scientific; as well

as it stresses only one aspect of a multi-dimensional phenomenon that can be put to a myriad of uses. First of all education has its intrinsic value which makes it important in a wider sense. As Newman puts it, education is useful in itself; it makes a gentleman, and to be a gentleman is definitely good. In this sense, anything good is useful, and as education is good, it is useful as well. By its very intrinsic scope, it develops in human beings intellectual prowess to understand their immediate environment, to determine their existence in this world, to find ways and means to make do with their existential question. What is more important in life than life itself?, and by having education to play a pivotal role in life, we can make it indispensable to our life. Only when education is able to deal successfully with the very existential issue of life, the question of success or failure may take care of itself. Once success, both professional and financial, is made subservient to the existential question of life, the true value of education comes to limelight. The education we are talking about here is humanities education that has its worth in Bangladesh or elsewhere in the world.

### **7.3.9 Exploiting humanities' complementary role**

In professional and intellectual arenas, the humanities have a crucial role in Bangladesh or elsewhere. It complements other branches of knowledge such as scientific and technological knowledge; and by this very attribute the humanities enhance their worth or relevance. Scientific or vocational knowledge makes man a mechanical being while knowledge of the humanities humanizes him. It is through the coexistence of science and the humanities we can expect someone to be a true human being. While such a dialectic simply identifies the intangible value of humanities education, the latter's collaboration with the scientific disciplines enhances its utilitarian status. However, in Bangladesh a healthy nexus between the sciences and the humanities is yet to evolve. Regrettably, the humanities and the technological fields do not exist on the same campus or in the same university. The humanities can come to a holy alliance with science and technology related fields in the Universities of Engineering and Technology in Bangladesh. And the humanities program at the Imperial College of Science, Medicine and Technology, discussed earlier, can work as a model. Notably, the University of Alberta in Canada is already offering a similar program at MA (Humanities Computing Master of Arts) level whose course objectives are outlined thus: "Established as a graduate programme open to students across the Faculty of Arts, the programme provides a unique opportunity for interdisciplinary studies that combine the rigours of a traditional Liberal Arts education with hands-on experience in emerging technologies" (Sinclair & Gouglas 2002, p. 167). The general and vocation oriented

universities in Bangladesh can also offer interdisciplinary courses such as humanities computing. Some vocational universities in the UK require their students to take liberal studies such as ethics as part of their curriculum (Hinchcliff 2006).

### **7.3.10 Reducing the science-humanities chasm**

Needless to say, the humanities graduates have little or no exposure to the sciences and technology disciplines. However, the gap between the humanities and the sciences can be bridged by introducing at humanities departments courses on the so-called soft sciences. Such initiatives appear to be absent from Bangladesh universities. Although subjects such as philosophy of sciences or history of sciences are offered in fragmentary forms as part of philosophy or history departments, their objectives do not target enhancing course's relevance in any visible form. Courses, for example science studies ("Science studies is an interdisciplinary research area that seeks to situate scientific expertise in a broad social, historical, and philosophical context. It is concerned with the history of scientific disciplines, the interrelationships between science and society, and the alleged covert purposes that underlie scientific claims. While it is critical of science, it holds out the possibility of broader public participation in science policy issues" [Wikipedia]), should be so designed as to create awareness in students about the impact of different sciences on people in terms of influencing their life pattern, intellectual trends, beliefs and dogmatism, development of scientific attitude, inculcation of scientificity that, combined together, have ramifications on the advancement of human society and its institutions. In Bangladesh the role of the humanities in promoting the sciences and scientificity of views in their social and intellectual context can never be exaggerated.

### **7.3.11 Curriculum expansion, reforms, and readjustment with employment in sight**

The humanities can also increase their relevance by expanding their sphere into business and commerce related disciplines. Using the Utica experience that promotes humanities-commerce nexus, universities in Bangladesh can promote cross-disciplinary collaboration. As already mentioned, Australian universities offer double-degree programs in Arts and Commerce. Besides, the BA (Honours) program in Bangladesh can include commerce related courses as part of the integrated Honours course. Currently, the integrated BA Honours program does not include any commerce courses. Notably, research has proved that

students who study business related course achieve interpersonal skills; as well as such courses infuse in them strong career-orientation or mentality. Notably, the humanities disciplines cannot, according to the same research, prepare students for either of these job-oriented skills. If, through conscious curriculum arrangements, a collaboration between these two areas can be established, it will go in favour of the humanities. As well as such a disciplinary alliance can develop numeracy skills in humanities graduates that play a vital role in preparing graduates for the employment market. Again, disciplinary cooperation between the humanities and commerce and business disciplines is much more viable than it is between the former and sciences and technology fields because of the latter's i.e. commerce and business disciplines' non-technical nature.

The relevance of any academic disciplines obviously depends on conscious curriculum reforms or arrangements. As our previous deliberations show, no humanities departments (other than English Department) at Dhaka University have consciously revamped their curriculums to make their fields employment savvy. It has become incumbent upon these departments to formulate problem-based curriculum with conscious planning to enhance job prospects. Neither the arts faculty nor its departments have any long term plan in this regard. The Faculty's curriculum development unit (if there is any) should review the existing curriculums for their employability and bring about necessary changes in this regard. That no such efforts have been undertaken is evident from the syllabi that have been consulted. Other than the English Department, as the course contents and the syllabi reveal, no departments have incorporated in their syllabus any conscious initiatives as to how their courses will prepare students for the rough and tumble of the job market. If any graduates from such disciplines as history, linguistics (for example) get other than academic jobs that are very scarce for such fields, they get them through sheer luck. The employability of such disciplines can be enhanced only when curriculums are reformed in view of the changes the job market undergoes. Needless to say, the individual departments or the faculty should conduct research on current curricular trends as well as job market requirements and reform curriculum reflecting what students need in the current socio-economic context.

While majority humanities students in Bangladesh get admitted to the courses with job expectations, neither the course contents nor the pedagogical practices are explicitly geared to prepare them for the employment market. As already established, humanities courses in Bangladesh are too theoretical, their main objectives being the acquisition of disciplinary

knowledge. Abstruse theorisation for the sake of sheer pedantry, philosophical abstraction to be deliberately unintelligible and designing syllabus and curriculum not to relate it to any tangible purpose appear to be dominant in humanities education in Bangladesh. Besides, in Bangladesh, by higher education, especially humanities education, students, teachers, policy makers and other stake holders simply mean theory-based education. Also, the ways teachers teach course, students study them, prepare for and take exams suit a theory-based system only. This simply happens as curriculum planners do not strive to orient curriculums to work-related skills and teachers do not deliver the curriculums in such a way as to equip students with job or tangible skills. Teachers follow the lecture method; they lecture on different theories and students, their number exceeding the ideal limit, listen as passive listeners, and a few exceptional students can grasp what is delivered in a scholarly manner. When the very class lecture cannot get students involved, how one can expect that the knowledge they acquire will be of any practical use. Another factor contributes to these trends – the universities remain oblivious to the skills and knowledge their students should need in the changed situation. It is taken for granted that humanities students will go for mainly teaching jobs for which theory-based disciplinary knowledge is enough; many others will compete for public service jobs that are highly competitive. They rest will leave their future to whatever comes their way. In other words, humanities education as a field itself is not geared to the job market; there is no conscious curriculum planning to make it job-focused, nor are the external factors conducive to making it practice or reality oriented. In order to make the humanities practical oriented through shedding their overly theoretical posture, some concerted efforts are needed: humanities students need to be more career-oriented and should take their courses with a well-defined career plan; there should be efforts to articulate what skills humanities education can impart to students and a linkage should be established between humanities skills and the job-market requirements; curriculums should be reformed according to the needs of employment market; pedagogical changes along with effective curriculum delivery means should be put in place accordingly. In this regard what Dr Michelle Zjhra, AUW's [Asian University for Women] Dean of undergraduate Studies, says is pertinent: "With a student-centered curriculum, the first step is to determine learning outcomes—what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate—and then develop how to reach these goals" (AUW Newsletter 2009, np).

### **7.3.12 Reorienting admission policy and decentralising curriculum formulation**

The centralized admission policy, admission regulations, course structure, course offerings are an impediment to reforms to embrace market forces. In Bangladesh universities do not enjoy full independence in terms of course structure, opening or closing new courses as per market demand or changes in the employment trends (notably, Johanson [2000] is highly critical of this constriction). As for example, the duration of the two-year Pass course had remained unchanged for almost 180 years; the three-year Honours program became a four-year program only recently. Such structural changes require bureaucratic approval. To cite another example, the curriculum at the National University is centrally designed with individual institutions having no hand in its formulation, and regrettably, almost 1800 affiliated colleges offering Pass program and 199 colleges Honours and Masters programs follow a straight-jacket uniform curriculum. Siddiqui (1997, p. 209) points out this oddity: "... under the present dispensation ... all course planning is centrally done by the National University... One University has now taken over the role of three. In the process, the chances of diversity in the syllabus has been further reduced." If the university courses are expected to offer age-appropriate and employable education and training, a one-size-fit-all curriculum cannot help achieve desired objectives. There may be an alternative arrangement; some reputed colleges may be made autonomous degree-awarding institutions with the rights to formulate their own curriculum and assessment systems (notably, the CNE was in favour of such structural changes). In India, as Jose (1993) indicates, there are a big number of autonomous colleges (St. Xavier College, Calcutta, for example; Stella Maris College, Madras, offers research degrees such as PhD, M Phil), and Bangladesh can follow this precedent to allow college level education to formulate its own policy and award degrees. As to the shortcomings of a centralised admission policy being followed by public universities in Bangladesh, Alamgir (2009) brings to the fore a number of pertinent points. The students having no aptitudes for a course end up getting selected for it as the centralised admission policy does have little scope for taking into consideration individual students' choice and aptitudes. Such a practice results in high rates of dropouts, poor performance, de-motivation, wastage of talents, lack of relevance between the courses studied and their demand in the job market or the country's socio-economic needs. As this same researcher pertinently points out, "By the end of first year, the departments lose out on nearly 30 per cent of the students they once admitted. The faculties stare down at a large section of students who have had no prior orientation, interest or aptitude in the subjects they have chosen to study. --- An alarming

implication of this, further, is that students drop grades while from the point of view of the students, their chances of finding employment in their chosen field of study is largely restricted” (Alamgir 2009,np).

### **7.3.13 Benchmarking, disciplinary rigours and focusing on student aptitude**

Unemployment of humanities graduates, so to speak graduates of any disciplines, is due to poor quality of their qualifications; in other words they are not properly educated even in terms of disciplinary knowledge. Low unemployment rates of humanities graduates from prestigious universities (Brint *et al* 2005) point to one crucial aspect that they graduate with appropriate disciplinary or subject-matter knowledge through proper intellectual rigours. Students need to delve deep into the founts of knowledge, learning, and wisdom (Kunstler, 2006) and once they are appropriately educated and acquire disciplinary knowledge, they are considered to possess generic skills as well, and they have the prospects of getting employed soon after graduating. Ostensibly, poor employability of humanities graduates in Bangladesh is due to poor quality of their qualification (i.e. they are not properly educated) along with the selection process which is almost open for certain disciplines, or if not open, meritorious students do not get attracted to them; and history, philosophy, Bengali, Islamic studies can be cited as examples. As well as once students are admitted to a course, they are expected to somehow come out with a degree. Such complacency, coupled with little intellectual rigour the graduation requirements demand of the students, faulty curriculum, defective delivery of curriculum and above all unscientific assessment procedures preclude students being properly educated. To make humanities graduates employable in Bangladesh or elsewhere, all these shortcomings need to be remedied. If getting employment after graduation is the prime objective, the supply of graduates needs to be reduced by admitting fewer students through stricter selection process or raising the admission requirements. Such academic ‘birth control’ (Weisbuch 1999) should apply mainly to courses or disciplines that lack ready employability. Also, the current admission processes need to be revamped as they are quite faulty as at the time of admission students are not screened on the strength of their aptitude or subject-specific performance in higher secondary exam. Their courses are determined through a general admission test that has little to do with their subject or discipline-specific performance or aptitude. As a result, students having no aptitude for literature end up admitting to Bengali Honours and so on. This breeds despair, frustration among students and ultimately they simply become drifters and get lost in the labyrinth of the academic world.

When they come out with ramshackle degrees, they find it almost impossible to get gainful employment. Notably, NEC-2003 has touched on this problem to some extent.

While employers' impression about the worth of humanities graduates as prospective job candidates is not always encouraging, the humanists are always found to be on the defensive or naively apologetic. Instead of defending naively any accusations of irrelevance or worthlessness of humanities qualifications, the realistic way is to determine what an arts degree ideally is and then to ensure that its graduates are ideally equipped with the generic skills, rigours, disciplinary depth, intellectual penetration which as a field the humanities are expected to equip the graduates with. In this regard, observations made by Johns-Putra and Jones (1999, p. 21) are very pertinent: "... achieving an Arts degree should require as much effort as it takes to attain a Law degree; and it is no secret that currently this is not the case." If pitted against such a benchmark, humanities degrees offered by the universities and colleges in Bangladesh will hardly stand the ground. To be marketable as well as employable, an ideal arts degree is required to be intellectually rigorous, and the solution to this rests upon "standards. Arts faculties have a responsibility to ensure that every student is marketable, and that the value of an Arts degree is undeniable. We cannot continue to hand out degrees that lead nowhere when young people have come to believe, and rightly so, that degrees must take them somewhere" (ibid). To reach such a benchmark in terms of standards and employability, the humanities must survive the test of intellectual depth, be coherent and possess, epistemologically speaking, a solid body of knowledge. As well as awarding a humanities degree should go through all the rigours (in terms of teaching, testing and assessment) all other intellectually demanding disciplines, such as law, abide by. The course requirements should include a substantial research component with emphasis on original works to be completed within a rigid deadline and the overall assessment process should entail demonstrating students' sound grasp of the discipline; any avenues for easy escape through less rigorous and less demanding subjects ( as for example, clustering Islamic studies with mathematics) must be sealed through across-the-faculty standardization. In other words, attaining a degree in the humanities must require as much effort, discipline and dedication as getting a science degree entails. Some disciplines such as Latin may not have ready employability, but the dedication and rigours it entails to get a degree in Latin may make it favourite to employers; notably, intelligence and disciplinary rigours go hand in hand. Similarly, a law degree is popular with employers outside the legal profession as employers think law as a discipline requires intellectual discipline and rigours. Actually, all the

humanities graduates, once they are subjected to appropriate intellectual rigour and excellence judged against an acceptable benchmark, can acquire “the kind of skills and ability that equate with employability” (Johns-Putra & Jones 1999, p. 21). Employability depends on how students can prepare themselves in the context of the larger society through education at an appropriate level; however, Lewis and Liegler (1998) think that students at the current age are simply undereducated.

### **7.3.14 Humanities’ role in moulding common culture**

In Bangladesh, the humanities can play a great role in the promotion of a common culture, national mind, national unification and integration through a study of history, philosophy, vernacular literature. Speaking politically, Bangladesh is a highly polarised society, the ultra-right Islamic and centre-right nationalist forces being pitted against the secular progressive forces. By now Bangladesh’s education system is virtually divided on two antagonistic forces having deleterious impacts on its unified national character, national mind and integration. To echo Newman (also, Chowdhury [2002] reiterates him), a progressive education system, which the humanities can help ensure, is able to integrate the country into a unified whole through forming a common culture, elevating the intellectual tone of society, cultivating the public mind, forming as well as refining national taste.

### **7.3.15 Exploiting humanities’ commercialisation potential**

Mass culture and the creative industries and their commercialization with economic development and income generation in sight have emerged as a viable sector in the academic and business arenas. At a time when the humanities are losing ground in the face of commercialization of knowledge, humanities courses in such areas as book writing and publishing, films and documentaries, arts, culture and heritage industry have the potential to increase their relevance. Countries like Taiwan, and New Zealand have identified these sectors as viable economic thrust areas both for domestic economic growth and export earnings. In Britain, the USA, and Australia these sectors collectively called Creative Industries contribute significantly to their GDP growth. As well as they are creating employment opportunities for millions of people who work in the tourism sector, in the publishing industry, film, acting, music and heritage industries. In addition to writers, actors, singers, artists, many other people work in these industries as cultural intermediaries. To train students for employment in these sectors, universities in Australia and many other countries

have introduced accredited courses in creative or cultural industries. The prestigious Stanford University has established a new cross-disciplinary institute, the Stanford Institute for Creativity and the Arts, to educate and train students in creative arts in consideration of the employment prospects this sector creates in the emerging knowledge economy. However, despite its rich cultural heritage, Bangladesh universities have not yet developed academic programs with the conscious objectives to make disciplines such as fine arts, drama, theatre, music relevant to the employment market or to income generation for national economic growth. The major public universities (general) such as Dhaka, Rajshahi and Jahangir Nagar have departments that offer culture related courses. Dhaka University offers Honours, MA and MPhil programs on music and theatre at its Department of Theatre and Music. Its course syllabus indicates that all the courses are mainly theory-based except the three courses entitled Concept of Communication (Course 207), Computer Fundamentals (Course 306) and Sounds and Recordings (Course 407). The courses on communication and sounds and recording have some employment focus and are skill-based – both generic and technical. Other than these three and the one on the history of music, the remaining courses are overly theoretical and rehashed over five years. Given the popularity that music, drama, film and the entertainment sector as a whole enjoy in Bangladesh, the sector can create a lot of jobs. Dhaka University should open a new department called Creative Industries and attempt to professionalize the sector by offering job-oriented practical and application-focused courses. It may offer courses at certificate, diploma, and Masters levels and follow QUT(Queensland University of Technology)’s course innovations and offer courses on film making, film editing, professional communication, interactive and visual design, creative production and arts management, animation, sounds, and recordings. While opening a new department has its constraints, the existing Department of Theatre and Music may shed its theoretical look and offer diploma or certificate level professional courses on recording and sounds, arts management whose graduates may find work as cultural intermediaries.

### **7.3.16 Exploring humanities’ social and civic roles**

As well known, education is one of people’s basic rights, and higher education situates them in their social hierarchy according to their mental, intellectual and cognitive capabilities. The role of higher education is to tap and measure their ability individually and educate them according to their aptitudes and attitudes. Here the humanities have a greater role to perform. When students with mediocre ability cannot get access to highly profession oriented courses in competition with their relatively talented counterparts, the humanities are the only options

to prevent them from being disadvantaged as an intellectual underclass or leftovers. In every country, including Bangladesh, the humanities can ensure social justice by ensuring equality of educational opportunity through mass access. Here the humanities assume a humanitarian, ethical role, and this clearly proves that higher education is important not only for its economic relevance but also for social and civic relevance. In Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries of the world, the populace will remain excluded from higher education unless the humanities are geared to meet mass demand for higher education. In this case universities bear a big responsibility to make the humanities intellectually accessible to students of average calibre. The way the humanities disciplines are presented to students in their recondite form, students get discouraged to study the humanities. In Bangladesh, disciplines such as philosophy, literature should shed off their arcane nature and present themselves in student-friendly curricular as well as pedagogical format. Abstruse terms, terminologies, jargons should be written and presented in easier and less demanding format. Philosophy should be taught to sharpen intellect and intelligence, not to practice pedantry; literature should be presented in its quintessential form to give genial pleasure as well as to expose them to deft language learning for the purpose of improving literacy and linguistic skills.

As Wolf (1996, np) puts it, “If the nation is at risk because too few students are studying sufficient science and math to ensure ... future military and economic strength, it is also at risk because too few students are studying fields of knowledge that will focus their attention on the need for social justice, social values, and responsible behavior.” In line with Wolf’s prescription (also, Chowdhury 2002), the greatest role of the humanities in Bangladesh is to use it for the development of a conscious citizenry and human capital in its varied forms and roles. Other than employable skills, a nation needs a conscious citizenry, conscientious intelligentsia, visionary idealists, dedicated leaders with a cause, and all these attributes can virtually be developed through the humanities. In a poor country like Bangladesh where cheap access to education is needed for developing human capital, humanities education that requires the least infrastructure and resources can be the easiest and most viable way to educate the populace in the greatest number. Also, humanities education consisting of philosophy and literature, that are mainly idea-based, can equip students in great numbers with trained intellect for socio-cultural awakening and transformation.

## 7.4 Conclusion

The humanities sector in Bangladesh higher education has real potential for further improvement to make it relevant to the country's varied socio-economic needs. However, for it to play its due role it requires to go through appropriate curricular, pedagogical, and structural reforms. If it needs to meet utilitarian needs, it has to gear its course offerings and course structure so as to equip its graduates with appropriate employable skills; also, it needs to respond to the prospects created by the humanities' orientation towards commercialisation ethos. Its current status in terms of quality and intellectual rigours is abysmally low and in order to reposition it to meet the country's overall intellectual and educational needs it must lift its standard and quality by adopting appropriate measures such as proper teaching strategies, assessment and testing methods, stricter selection procedures, proper orientation of students to university life and its scholarly demand, strategies to offer students admission according to their aptitudes and preferences. The overly theoretical structure of the humanities needs to be brought closer to practice and application by minimising the gap through interdisciplinary approach and alignment towards techno-scientific disciplines; their vulnerability with regard to competitiveness in the employment market may be strengthened, again, through disciplinary collaboration in the form of double or tagged degrees. While the humanities have an egalitarian role, it does not mean cheapening their qualifications by lowering or compromising quality; it can better be achieved by making higher education more accessible to students with mediocre intellect through shedding of esotericism as well as deliberate pedantry. Instead of deliberate intellectualisation that thwarts application of knowledge to real-life problems, the humanities should target building attitudes, developing generic intrinsic skills through student-friendly pedagogy and interactive teaching methods. Now that the research problem reaches its tentative solution, the final Chapter will aim at outlining the thesis' overall contribution to the wide higher education sector, its future direction as well as its tentative strengths and limitations.

# Chapter 8

## Conclusion

In this research project I have striven to posit the relevance of humanities education in the wider context of the term ‘relevance’. Although the humanities are not able to fulfil pure utilitarian or tangible purposes, they can play significant roles in any society in its intellectual, political, cultural, aesthetic, ethical, and moral uplift. While theoretically universities, national governments, policy-makers trumpet support for the humanities, in practice their responsibilities hardly go beyond the phase of rhetoric. In this thesis, my endeavours to look at the issue of relevance of the humanities in its wider perspective have become a reality. As to its overall contribution to the wider field of higher education, this thesis, in addition to answering the research question “How can the humanities sector of Bangladesh higher education be made relevant to various utilitarian, socio- political, intellectual, cultural and ethico-moral situations?”, sheds important light on the following aspects of higher education:

### 8.1 A unique historical insight

Education historians generally deal with the history of higher education in its totality in the light of its social, intellectual, political, cultural, and pedagogical development. Although holistic in nature, such a treatment of the history of higher education pays scant attention to the relevance of higher education as a separate phenomenon. The treatment of the history of higher education in my thesis is unique in that it singles out the topic ‘relevance’ and dwells upon it solely in its intellectual, aesthetic, and utilitarian perspectives. Phenotypical in nature, it is a snapshot of how historically higher education has performed different socio-economic, cultural and intellectual roles or how higher education has responded and adjusted its roles in view of the changed circumstances. In consideration of the importance of the issue of higher education and its relevance in the current situation, such a separate treatment of the issue in question in its historical perspectives gives it a unique scholarly dimension.

## **8.2 A syncretic treatment of higher education**

The humanities as an academic field are mainly judged from their archetypal attributes. It is, rather stereotypically, taken for granted that they have hardly any tangible value. Any attempt to use the humanities for useful purposes is looked down upon with suspicion. Whoever strives to put these disciplines to tangible use in terms of employment and employability is considered a maverick. In fact, many humanists, toeing an orthodox line, deify or revere theorists such as Newman, Arnold as inviolable or sacrosanct; crossing the line demarcated by them means committing deadly sins. On the other hand, many higher education theorists on utilitarian line, Whitehead and the modern votaries of the techno-economic paradigm of higher education for example, are not ready to give the humanities even a peripheral place in the changed circumstances and consider them nothing but useless diversion or sheer luxury. In this thesis I have tried to resolve such antagonism and shown that a synthesis between these conflicting theoretical entities is possible: the humanities and the profession-oriented courses are not divorced or detached from each other. They rather constitute a common continuum with their characteristic value in their own area of jurisdiction. The Newmanian view of higher education known for its elitist attitudes complements the professional fields and vice versa; they form an alliance of mutual convenience to serve society in its healthy growth and functioning. While tangible techno-scientific, business and managerial skills are needed for the economic prosperity of society at personal and collective levels, intellectual elevation and enrichment, development of humanistic outlook, attitude building, nurturing culture and cultural sophistication can help build a cultured, civilized and humanized society. Any society needs both economic and cultural and intellectual wealth for its balanced growth. This thesis has shown how such a balance can be achieved by minimizing the gap between the disparate branches of knowledge through disciplinary convergence, collaboration, intellectual alliance, epistemological reconfiguration and redefining. Such a disciplinary and epistemological synthesis demonstrates that both the humanities and professional fields are equally important for economic, intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic purposes.

## **8.3 The philosophy of higher education realigned**

The very foundation of higher education, along with epistemological, philosophic and intellectual strengths, is its scientificity. Education based on dogma or doctrine, blind faith, sheer pedantry, rigid abstraction and intellectualism having no touch with reality is not real education in its epistemological sense. Knowledge needs to be accessible and valuable (I

have avoided the term ‘useful’ because of its too explicit utilitarian connotation) in both tangible and intangible terms. As well as knowledge needs to have an inner strength which is its scientificity; and scientificity does not mean acquiring scientific knowledge or studying science *per se*; it means the scientific spirit or rationale that saves it from being ecclesiastical sermons. This very spirit present even in non-scientific knowledge elevates its epistemological stature. As well as knowledge needs to be judged on the basis of its holistic philosophic spirit or orientation, variously called philosophic acquisition of knowledge (Newman) or cosmos of knowledge (Jaspers). Skill-based knowledge which enables the knower to do some set jobs does really lack intellectual strength and acuity. Also, knowledge does have a thinking component; the knower must be able to think and contemplate; she must be able to build a rapport between the concrete and the abstract; she must needs build a connection between the world of ideality and reality; she needs to be imbued with intellection and imagination alongside techno-scientific skills and knowledge; she has to have the ability to philosophise alongside possessing practical skills and intelligence. As evident, this thesis deals with knowledge encompassing its true epistemological, scientific, philosophic, and intellectual spirit or dimensions.

#### **8.4 Utilitarianism redefined**

The purpose of knowledge creation should be to maximise social benefit, and to achieve this end, disciplinary and curriculum arrangements can include social service elements. Rampant utilitarianism without a human face or noble mission should not be morally, ethically, intellectually, and socially permissible. However, utilitarianism considered in tandem with social mission becomes morally and socially acceptable. Many economic activities are not socially permissible because of their lack of noble intention. Equally untenable, at least morally, is the view that knowledge should be directed towards gaining financial benefits without any qualms of conscience. Such a proclivity is sure to undermine humanity, humanitarian values and the humane face of knowledge. Such a moral quandary can be avoided if material prosperity achieved through knowledge creation and acquisition can be given a human face both epistemologically and morally. When techno-scientific and business-related knowledge having direct utility is used to achieve any noble mission, it gains moral and ethical acceptability. The driving safety project already discussed elsewhere is one way of using knowledge in order to create wealth in an ethically and socially acceptable way. There are other ways to derive social benefits from professional education. As for example, professional people can compensate for their financial gains by

devoting some of their knowledge and expertise to helping the poor or the distressed. When such professionals have formal education or training in leadership and community work during their student life, they can become better prepared to serve the community. This way when professional knowledge achieves human face through a public service element, it can counteract the current unbridled utilitarianism. Utilitarianism gains a public face and moral recognition.

## **8.5 Employment seen from newer perspectives**

The view that knowledge should target immediate employment does not always bode well. Direct relation between training and education and employment works well only in limited cases of professional training and education. Medicine and law can be cited as examples, and these professions known for their ‘closure’ form a small fraction of all the academic disciplines. In maximum cases the correlation between training and job is very tenuous. In the UK context, a large number of students go for jobs outside their original qualifications. Such a trend seems to exacerbate at a time when job-skills and their requirements change very frequently. In the changed circumstances when employers rely more on intrinsic skills, higher education should target improving graduates’ employability. Matching skills and qualifications with job requirements is not always that easy. Skills vary from employment to employment; also, knowledge and skills gained through higher education requires to be supplemented with on-the-job training. In such cases knowledge earned through higher education becomes less significant. Another pertinent point is that any short- or long-term planning to increase employment opportunities through higher education may fall through because of the unpredictability of the job market. So, the realistic strategy should be to target through higher education graduates’ employability rather than employment. Besides, employment or employability is one of the many objectives of gaining higher education. Education gives direction; it empowers and enables human beings to live creatively and satisfyingly an intellectual and aesthetic life. In the current complex world when the race for survival is getting complex, simply a set of job skills will not stand graduates in good stead. They need life skills, creativity, imagination which higher education should target alongside employment skills. This is more true of developing countries that are ill-equipped and constrained in terms of resources to compete on a par with the rich nations of the world.

## **8.6 Fresh perspective on curriculum and pedagogical practice**

This thesis sheds fresh light on how different skills can be developed through conscious curriculum reforms or innovation. Specially designed curriculum with emphasis on communication can increase students' interpersonal skills which prospective managers and administrators need to be good at. Research-based courses can equip students with improved written skills, intellectual discipline, and synthesizing skills; high level of numeracy skills can prepare students for jobs that require manipulating figures, and students with higher numeracy fare well in managerial jobs in the banking and finance sectors; knowledge of current affairs improve self-confidence; oral presentations, seminars, debate and discussion can enhance self-confidence as well as power of articulation which employers value. Certain arts and humanities courses such as dance, music can enhance concentration; literature with an emphasis on the language can hone writing skills; literature, arts and sports can reduce dropouts; literature with its emphasis on aesthetic pleasure can help solve social problems such as homelessness, addiction. Students with low intellectual level who cannot handle abstract ideas need to go for courses that help build attitude and develop general intelligence; their curriculum should be problem-based and reality oriented so that they can prepare themselves for their everyday existence. Also, this thesis highlights what skills and qualifications certain employment sectors ask of the graduates. Graduates from science, technology and related field are recruited on the strength of their subject-specific and relevant knowledge while arts and humanities graduates need to be versatile in a number of skills. All these call for different curriculum and pedagogical arrangements and orientation for arts and humanities students.

## **8.7 A renewed philosophic perspective**

When we consider different philosophies of education – utilitarianism, liberalism, pragmatism, instrumentalism, humanism – separately, they seem to treat the topic 'higher education' in its compartmentalized form. They remain exclusive entities with no relation or linkage between them. Such an exclusionary treatment of higher education in terms of its philosophical import makes it problematic to ascertain its due role in society. Knowledge compartmentalized cannot be applied to problems that require concerted approaches. In such a situation higher education's different dimensions as well as philosophical approaches need to be brought together as well as integrated into a unified whole which we can call 'holism'. Under such a unified philosophic approach, higher education will perform different roles simultaneously. As the changed situation demands,

individual students need multifarious skills that in turn require them to be conversant with a number of disciplines. Such objectives can be achieved only when creation, dissemination and acquisition of knowledge are seen holistically. Under such an arrangement knowledge production will be problem-oriented, collaborative, transdisciplinary; different branches of knowledge, be they humanistic or techno-scientific, will complement one another, thus reducing the theory-practice divide.

## **8.8 Relevance placed in a newer perspective**

Modern theorists such as Drucker (1993), Gibbons (1998) and their votaries define the term 'relevance' in its narrow utilitarian term and apply it to employment and other economic activities that have direct relation to wealth creation. Obviously, such trends limit the efficacy of higher education and exclude other more ennobling and more elevated objectives which it has been accomplishing since the time of antiquity. As my thesis reveals, relevance is not limited to pure utilitarian objectives alone; its jurisdiction gets extended to accomplish intellectual, social, cultural, political, moral, and ethical responsibilities.

## **8.9 Relevance is not always discipline-specific**

The mistaken view is that profession-oriented courses have greater relevance. In reality, relevance depends on intellectual or disciplinary rigours, selectivity of courses, graduates' mental and emotional state, pedagogical and curriculum practice, students' intellectual level, aptitudes and motivation. Of them intellectual rigours deserve special consideration, and it is seen that courses having the least linkage with direct employment can attain relevance or employability once students are required to go through rigorous teaching and assessment processes. That is why, as already mentioned, even humanities graduates from prestigious universities that maintain high standard are highly sought-for in the employment market.

## **8.10 Success redefined**

The enforced relationship between higher education and economic and professional success does a great disservice to the actual mission of higher education. This thesis has focused on this particular issue and attempted to refine success in terms of intellectual elevation as well as satisfaction. Success, like happiness, is relative; as well as it is person-specific. While financial success is not to be discounted, to pin all hope of life on it is

irrational. Success through high level intellectual perfection, creative and artistic creation, social and community service is no less significant. Once success is perceived in terms of its various shapes and contours, the relevance of higher education attains new meaning.

### **8.11 Re-contextualization of higher education**

Research findings on higher education in one country can be replicated and implemented in a new setting with necessary contextual readjustments. In this thesis I have endeavoured to use research findings derived in other countries to improve the higher education system in Bangladesh. It is more likely that Bangladesh will greatly benefit from this research exercise. However, in order for such research findings to be effective in local context, the country's socio-economic realities need to be taken into consideration. Actually, the very needs of higher education must originate from the indigenous roots. The US higher education system replicated a lot from the German system. However, the elitist nature of German research-based universities had to be readjusted to suit the mass and utilitarian nature of the US system. The research culture was replicated but made more application oriented so that higher education could meet the needs and expectations of a highly enterprising immigration population that primarily pinned their hope on material prosperity. On the other hand, the higher education system introduced in India on British elitist model could hardly create any real impact in a vastly illiterate society other than creating a class of elites as well as a band of civil-military bureaucracy. Dhaka University's Oxbridge-like residential settings were a mere grafting on the socio-cultural settings of the poorest country in the world. As it lacked contextual adjustment, higher education in Bangladesh is still to attain a mass status. Therefore, re-contextualising higher education needs adjustment with local realities.

### **8.12 Tangible application value of the humanities**

The prevalent belief is that humanities education has no tangible value beyond its end in itself: it makes a gentle man; it enhances intellectual power in its pure abstraction. Belying such traditional beliefs, this thesis brings to the fore some of humanities' tangible values. Courses such as professional writing, applied ethics, bioethics, public history, and applied linguistics deal with tangible issues and graduates who do these types courses are readily employable. Also, reflexivity, a postmodern phenomenon, receives renewed treatment in this thesis, and it has added value to the humanities. It helps solve various socio-economic problems which techno-scientific inventions have spawned in the post-industrial world. In

order for the humanities field to perform tangible application role, it needs to professionalize itself through curriculum and structural reforms. As seen already, humanities graduates can enhance the relevance of their qualifications through professional training at postgraduate level.

### **8.13 Higher education's predictable contour**

The state of higher education with its increasing focus on utilitarian needs may take a newer shape in the near future. As experts in the field predict, the rampant utilitarianism of the current age as represented by such for-profit universities as The University of Phoenix may get reversed and higher education may target greater humanitarian roles; it may aim at saving the planet from its impending destruction due to environmental degradation and unbridled economism. In such a situation, higher education will assume a responsibility to educate the people to become humane, morally conscious and ethically responsible. Although it remains to be seen if such a prediction will come to fruition, there are already signs that higher education will have to embrace new roles; reform its curriculums and reframe pedagogical practices in view of the changes that are in the offing. The advent of such disciplines or issues as environmental science, sustainable ecology, sustainable development ("Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"[ Ecologically Sustainable Development, Australian Government, Department of the Environment Website]) seems to confirm that such a prediction is not without any basis.

### **8.14 Limitations of this study and future research opportunities**

The most glaring limitation of this thesis stems from its very methodology which is descriptive, interpretive and hence subjective. Although I have tried to remain objective in analysing and giving my personal voice to the narrative, such objectivity may be misconstrued and draw flak from people with vested interest or who are not ready to be enlightened by rational and empirical disposition. One example may be the thesis' stand against blind faith or deep-rooted politico-religious belief or dogma. Although based on empirical evidence, my negative views about the *madrasas* or Islamic colleges and the education they are imparting may even sound heretic to the country's orthodox elements. Even when such doctrinaire elements are not involved, any conclusion drawn out of my views and analysis may be contested or remain at best tentative.

The topic of this thesis itself is elusive and has a kaleidoscopic contour. Critical views about the relevance of humanities education are highly polarised and at times tainted by what the critics want the topic and its worth to be instead of what it should be in the changed socio-economic and intellectual context. The hardcore traditionalists and other votaries of higher education toeing Newman's idealist line consider it even a sacrilege to view the humanities from utilitarian or commercial considerations. In fact, never in the history of higher education the issue of humanities and its worth has been looked at from so many conflicting viewpoints. While holding a middle ground can be the best way to reconcile differing views, the traditionalists are not ready to cede any ground. On the other hand, the pragmatists utilitarians consider the humanities nothing but ideal diversions. Such a polarised stand on the topic of this thesis really precludes consensus of any sort. All this considered, no definitive or ideally acceptable outcome is possible from such a research project.

As already mentioned elsewhere, the area of higher education in Bangladesh is not well-researched. As such for data I had to heavily rely on scholarship produced or explored in the West. Here arises the question of contextualising or localising the research output. However, I believe contextualising does not remain a problem as research data tested in human situations are able to transcend such geographical barriers. Notably, educational research findings have resilience in transcending time and geographical location and this is why we see the modern university as an institution itself, despite its diffusion the world over, has been able to retain its quintessential character almost intact since the beginning of the Middle Ages. Also, some of the Chapters, especially Chapter Five and Six, may appear overly descriptive. Such descriptivism should not mar the analytical value of the thesis as this practice of describing is not an end in itself. It is rather a means to an end; the end being fleshing out data relevant to the thesis topic. Such descriptivism is used to achieve two main objectives – to present the reality in the form of a narrative as well as to glean relevant information that remains subsumed under the veneer of such a narrative. Here the narrative is purposive, explorative, probing and methodologically integral and hence integrated.

Again, no research can claim to be conclusive as well as perfect in relation to its findings and outcome. A thesis can at best reach a tentative conclusion leaving room for further research and my thesis is no exception. In fact, the issue of the relevance of humanities

education is really complex, and given its tenuous linkage with the real world, it requires constant reconfiguring. While its relevance in terms of intellectual, cultural, political, aesthetic, moral and ethical considerations is beyond doubt, its relevance to the employment market and similar utilitarian issues is always shaky. Although my research has attempted to improve its relevance in utilitarian terms, further research is needed in the following aspects:

Numeracy is an important skill which employers value in prospective employees. It is still unclear how this skill can be developed in humanities graduates. It is undenyng a fact that humanities students have different aptitudes and intellectual ability that preclude working with figures and quantitative data. Most students who are good at mathematics and related fields mainly choose to do science and technology related courses. Without aptitudes for mathematics or statistics, humanities students will not fare well in these disciplines; in such a situation even conscious curriculum reforms will not produce desired efficacy. Research is needed to improve humanities students' cognitive ability so that they can handle figures or improve numeracy through curriculum reforms.

The convergence between science and technology on the one hand and the humanities on the other is very hard to achieve. Disciplinary collaboration between these two disparate fields can greatly improve the relevance of the humanities. However, it is really problematic to use science and other related disciplines to the advantage of the humanities. Subjects such as history of science, philosophy of science, humanities and technology, humanities computing simply bear the label 'science'. Their relevance in the job market is questionable. As well as collaboration between the humanities and hard sciences is not that easy. It is not clear how humanities students will handle logical reasoning which the humanities computing require. Courses such as multimedia, graphics, imaging, digital content creations may have some humanities elements; but in reality they are more science and technology dependent, and as such the possibility that humanities graduates will benefit from them is not that bright. Again, students with pure humanities background may face insurmountable problems in handling the difficulty level of such disciplines. Further research is needed to facilitate disciplinary conflation between such disparate disciplines.

To rely on intrinsic skills to make the humanities employment oriented is not that safe, stable, and promising. They are important as skills; however, their tangible value and ready employability are always in doubt. So, more research needs to be conducted on how

students, especially humanities students, can become readily employable on the strength of pure intrinsic skills. Also, it is still to be established how such skills can ideally be developed in humanities students. Although some curriculum adjustments which we have discussed in the data chapters can help develop intrinsic skills in students, it still remains a puzzle how in reality intrinsic skills develops or what curricular arrangements are needed to this purpose. More research requires to be conducted in this regard.

The antagonism between elitism and massification of higher education is a real sticking point; it is seen that humanities students graduating from elite institutions that follow strict and selective admission procedures are more competitive in the job market. On the other hand, massifying higher education which is mainly achievable through the humanities is sure to compromise quality that may affect employability. As well as maintaining disciplinary rigour to achieve high standard may not suit the mediocre intellectual level of humanities students. While it is said that that the humanities can improve their relevance through selectivity and disciplinary rigour, in reality to implement any curricular change to that effect remains always problematic. As well as it means restricting education that in turn runs counter to the spirit of massification. Research is needed to explore how massification of higher education and improving relevance can go hand in hand.

Can the humanities be made really relevant? The very idea of the humanities and their relevance in its purely utilitarian import appears to be incompatible. While the relevance of humanistic education in social perspective is achievable, it becomes almost impossible to ensure an optimum balance between the epistemological nature of the humanities and their economic relevance. As well as the issue 'relevance' itself is a dynamic one. It is ever evolving and shifting in keeping with society's socio-political and economic changes. The findings of my thesis leave open opportunities for further research at least in two aspects: the topic being ephemeral, it will always need to be seen in the context of any emerging development; the very complexity as well as paradigmatic unreliability of the topic calls for more sustained attention from the scholarly community.

## **8.15 Implications for policy and practice**

This thesis will have significant impact on Bangladesh higher education in terms of its policy and practice. As it is seen during my data collection phase, there is a dearth of research activities in Bangladesh on its higher education policy. It is almost certain that no

such work on the issue of the humanities and their relevance has so far been done in Bangladesh. As the thesis has a focus on Bangladesh, it is definitely going to have direct and unambiguous implications for Bangladesh. The education bureaucracy, policy planners, academics, and higher education students will be able to use this thesis as an authoritative document for the purpose of academic research, policy formulation, policy research, curriculum development, and course restructuring. Notably, the humanities segment of Bangladesh higher education is most vulnerable in terms of job creation and employability. The most crucial benefit will accrue from its sole focus on how the humanities disciplines at universities and other institutions of higher education in the country can improve their relevance to the job market through desired curriculum and pedagogical reforms.

The above discussion demonstrates that my thesis has made significant scholarly inroad into higher education as a whole and higher education in Bangladesh in particular. In the case of the later, the field and its domain of research have undergone significant transformation following this thesis and its findings. Due to this thesis and its notable contribution the higher education sector in Bangladesh will draw renewed attention from the scholarly community. In its tangible term as well as as part of its direct salutary aspects, the sector and its policy instruments will receive fresh directions in their efforts to reform the humanities sector of the system. With the findings taken into consideration, the scholarly domain does no longer remain in its static stage; it has gone forward and got much more enriched. As well as it has set the ground for further research in the field. The future researchers will not need to start from the vacuum the field that really was; they will start from a new height and strive to push the scholarly frontiers of Bangladesh higher education farther.

To conclude, the roles the humanities perform in any society are perennially important. The very existence of human society is contingent upon certain norms, values, practices, be they socio-political, religio-cultural, aesthetico-intellectual. These very attributes which the humanities promote, propagate, and uphold are enough justification for humanities' existence in any society. The humanities work, at times quite imperceptibly, to contribute to society's healthy and balanced growth. While the intangible skills students need for personal growth as well as social benefit may be acquired, as Flexner, Gasset, and Jaspers believe, as a healthy by-product of their higher education experience, there are ample avenues to develop them through conscious curriculum reform. Needless to say, society

does need to rely on tangible resources, skills, and expertise which help maintain its material existence and economic growth as well as sustenance. The complexities of the postmodern world necessitates, on pragmatic grounds, possessing such tangible or usable skills even more paramount. As this thesis shows, humanities students go for higher education mainly to get jobs to prepare them for a respectable means of income or monetary gains. Although there are exceptions, after graduation students in the main do not want to be seen as intellectual layabouts; nor do they want to see their degrees as mere adornment. This very fact necessitates equipping humanities graduates with some sorts of usable tangible skills through higher education. Then, what are the tangible skills the humanities graduates, given their different intellectual aptitudes, orientations, and attitudes, can realistically be equipped with? As seen, humanities graduates can capitalise on certain skills that are specific to their own disciplines, and these are high level of language and literacy skills in both vernacular and foreign languages which can be used in creative and professional writing, journalism, teaching, translating, interpreting, research, publication, editing, international communication, and business. As well as the conduit between foreign languages and their cultural specificity can give the humanities an added edge in equipping their graduates with employable skills. Above all, the humanities disciplines have their own knowledge base, epistemological and methodological strengths, and once humanities graduates are well-educated maintaining high intellectual rigours and acquiring adequate subject matter knowledge, they will be in greater demand in the world of employment. To achieve all these objectives and attributes specific to the humanities, appropriate curriculum reforms, changes in pedagogical practices, assessment methods, and appropriate structural reforms such as restructuring admission policy, course offerings, and selection procedures require to be adopted. In Bangladesh context, such measures are more urgently needed as higher education in this country is yet to go through notable reforms and transformation. This thesis has, tentatively though, demonstrated how the humanities disciplines in Bangladesh can reform and reorient themselves to improve their relevance in both tangible and intangible terms through appropriate curriculum reforms, innovation, and structural changes.

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# Appendix 1

## Faculty of Arts Dhaka University

### Departments

1. Department of Arabic [1921]
2. Department of Bengali [1921]
3. Department of English [1921]
4. Department of History [1921]
5. Department of Islamic Studies [1921]
6. Department of Philosophy [1921]
7. Department of Sanskrit & Pali [1921]
- \*Department of Urdu & Persian (currently, two separate departments) [1921]
8. Department of Islamic History & Culture [1948]
9. Department of Information Science & Library Management [1959]
10. Department of Theatre & Music [1989]
11. Department of Linguistics [1992]
12. Department of World Religions [1999]
- \*13. Department of Persian [2008]
- \*14. Department of Urdu [2008]

Source: Dhaka University Website