

TOWARDS TOTAL LITERACY

SOME THOUGHTS ON
ADULT EDUCATION

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY
SEPTEMBER 8, 1991

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PREFACE

It was on 8 September, 1965 that the World Congress of Ministers of Education met in Teheran to discuss the problem of illiteracy for the first time at the International level and took a number of important decisions to deal with this problem on a global scale. Since then, this day has become historic and is being observed every year as the International Literacy Day.

This day has special significance for all of us in India in view of the enormous problem of illiteracy still persisting in our country. Since its inception, the National Literacy Mission has been making a relentless struggle to eradicate illiteracy especially in the most productive age-group of 15-35.

We have had some successes on this front during the last decade as revealed by the Census of India 1991 — while 118.13 million persons have become literate, only 22.10 million persons have been added as illiterate. Thus, there was a near 50 per cent increase in the number of literates as compared to an increase of 7 per cent in the number of illiterates.

It is also noteworthy that during the last couple of years, because of the new initiatives undertaken by the National Literacy Mission, several areas in the country have achieved either full literacy or are in the process of achieving full literacy. For example, the entire state of Kerala has been declared fully literate; the Union Territory of Pondicherry and two districts in Karnataka — Bijapur and Dakshina Kannada — have also acquired this status. So is the case with the districts of Midnapore and Burdwan in West Bengal. A number of other districts in the country have undertaken Total Literacy Campaigns and it is hoped by the end of current year most of them would be achieving full literacy status.

'Towards Total Literacy' reflects the different aspects of the countrywide literacy endeavour for achievement of Total Literacy. We are happy to bring out this compilation of articles on the auspicious occasion of International Literacy Day.

I am grateful to all our contributors for their valuable views and suggestions. I am also thankful to Shri G. Sivaswamy, Deputy Director and other members of the Publication Unit for their effort in bringing out this publication and for its printing.

September 8, 1991

A.K. BASU
DIRECTOR

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LITERACY AND THE POSSIBLE DREAM

Paulo Freire

There is a more or less widespread and naive belief in the power of institutionalised education in transforming reality. Some of my critics think that I share this assumption. It is not systematic education which somehow moulds society, but on the contrary, society which, according to its particular structure, shapes education in relation to the needs and interests of those who control the power in this society.

No society is organized on the basis of its actual educational system which, having instilled a certain image of man, would then ensure the proper functioning of society. On the contrary, the educational system is created and re-created by the social practices which constitute a given society.

We cannot deny the tremendous role which the educational system has in preserving and reproducing the social model which guarantees its survival, or ignore the fact that those who go through this system do not all obtain the same results. But this does not authorize us to attribute to the educational system a power which it lacks, namely, of creating a society; as if it were a larger entity than the latter.

For example, it is not bourgeois education which created the bourgeoisie—that emerged from a concrete historical situation. And it is precisely for this reason that a bourgeois system of education could never have been established if the bourgeoisie has not been in power. In other words, a radical transformation of the educational system is contingent upon the radical transformation of society. Education is both an

expression and an instrument of society. But since social transformations are not mechanical, but historical facts, which constitute human situations, they involve practical actions which require a certain level of education.

Many people naively believe, I repeat, that such an education is inherent to the systematic education of the very society which they propose to transform. In reality, the role of systematic education, in the repressive society from which it stems and on which it acts as an agent of social control, is to preserve that society. Consequently, to conceive of systematic education as an instrument of liberation is simply to invent the rules of the game and, as we pointed out earlier, to endow education with an autonomous capacity for transforming society, the very process without which liberation as a permanent aspiration is meaningless.

This simple-minded reasoning is not only an instance of alienated consciousness, in which reality takes on the appearance of illusion, and illusion that of reality, but it also reinforces this alienation. In this case, the reality is precisely the non-autonomy of systematic education, that is, of schooling, in the process of social transformation. From the naive point of view which I have just referred to, the illusion becomes a 'real possibility', and any recognition of the real state of affairs is characterized as 'destructive pessimism'. Yet those who liberate themselves by examining these illusions critically are anything but pessimistic; on the contrary, by acquiring a progressively clear perception of the dynamic relations between society and education, these

people have no reason to assume a negative position.

Clarity of perception, which is no free gift, but is labouriously acquired through conscious action, leads us to discover the true role of education in the process of liberation, that is, to discover the functions and the different but connected modes of education corresponding to the different but also connected moments in the process of liberation.

I think it would be useful to go over some of the affirmations I have made so far. What exactly was I trying to say when I referred to the different but connected forms that a liberating education must assume in the different but connected moments of the process of liberation?

First of all, it seems important to emphasize the fact that things like liberation, oppression, violence, freedom and education, are not abstract categories, but historical ones. Thus, when I speak about men or women, I am referring to historically situated human beings, not to abstract ideas. I am referring to people whose consciousness is intimately linked to their real social lives. Furthermore, since I cannot prefigure a historical era of absolute freedom, I refer to liberation as a permanent process in history. Similarly, the true and permanent revolution is a revolution which both has been and is no longer, since in order to be it must be in a process of becoming.

Now the process of liberation, and thus the educational action which must accompany it, varies with respect to methods, strategies and content, not only from one society to another, but also within a single society, in relation to its historical situation. It also varies with respect to the actual power relations existing in society, the level of confrontation between classes in the process of liberation.

The liberating effort of education is one thing in a society where the socio-economic cleavages are clearly visible,

where the contradictions are obvious, and the violence of the dominant class on the dominated classes is crude and primary; it is quite another thing in a highly modernized capitalist society which enjoys a high level of 'social well-being', where existing contradictions are less easily discernible, and the 'manipulation of consciousness' exerts an indisputable influence in masking reality. In the latter case, much more so than in the first, and for obvious reasons, the educational system becomes a highly sophisticated instrument of social control.

Educational action is yet another thing in a society which has undergone a radical transformation. In the first example, that is, in a society which has not experienced revolutionary transformations, and where the class character of society subsists, whether its contradictions are apparent or not, it is quite naive to imagine, as we mentioned earlier, that a systematic education will help change that society's structures. In such a society, a truly liberating education will correspond closely to the process of consciously organizing the dominated classes in view of transforming the oppressive structures. Consequently, such an education can only provide a lucid awareness of one's situation through the critical analysis of reality, which presupposes concrete and practical action within and on that reality.

In the other case, in which a new society is beginning to emerge from the revolutionary transformation of the old one — not a mechanical transformation, but a painful, difficult one—things can happen differently; all the more so that the new power structure is better equipped to reject the temptation of 'consumerism' which essentially characterizes the capitalist mode of production. With the appearance of new human relations, based on a different material reality, and in this case over-coming the old dichotomies typical of bourgeois society, such as between manual and intellectual work, between practice and

theory, and of course between teaching and learning, a new system of education can emerge. The education of liberation which at an earlier stage corresponded to a process of organizing the dominated classes or groups in order to transform oppressive structures, without which liberation is impossible, here becomes a systematic effort to serve the ideals of the new society. These ideals are, of course, antagonistic to the beliefs of the old dominant class, which feels oppressed simply because it can no longer oppress others. It is only to the extent that the new power structure consolidated itself and that new social relations emerge that the nostalgic yearning for power of the old dominant class will progressively disappear.

Whereas the task of the educational system in the old society was to maintain the **status quo**, it must now become an essential element in the process of permanent liberation. It is thus impossible to deny, except intentionally or by innocence, the political aspect of education. The basic problems of education are not strictly pedagogical, but political and ideological.

I have insisted on the impossibility--which is evident to me--of considering the educational system as an instrument of social transformation. I do not, however, deny the use of making serious efforts within this system.

The problem encountered by all educators who embark on the path of liberation, at any level, within or outside the school system, though inevitably within society (that is, strategically outside the system, but tacitly in it), is that of knowing what to do, how, when, with, whom, why, for and against whom.

For this reason, whenever I have had to deal with the problem of adult literacy programmes, as now, I have never reduced it to a set of techniques and methods. I do not want to underestimate or overestimate their importance. But

methods and techniques, which are obviously indispensable, are always created and re-created in the context of their real application. What seems fundamental to me is the clear-cut position which the teacher must assume in relation to the political option; this implies values and principles, a position with respect to the 'possible dream' that is to be accomplished. It is impossible to dissociate techniques and methods from the 'possible dream'. For example, if a teacher opts for capitalist modernization, then adult literacy programmes cannot go beyond, on the one hand, enabling persons to read texts with no regard to content, and on the other, increasing their chances of selling their labour on what is not accidentally called the 'job market'. If the teacher opts for another solution, then the essential task of the literacy programme is to help illiterates to discover the importance not of being able to read alienated or alienating stories, but of making history, while being fashioned by it.

Risking to seem artificially symmetrical, I would venture to say that in the first case, 'learners' will never be asked to evaluate critically the conditions of their mental training, to reflect on the causes of their situation, to take a fresh 'reading' of the reality which is presented to them as absolute and to which they are simply forced to adapt. Here thought and language are severed from objective reality; the techniques of absorption of the ruling ideology are never mentioned; knowledge is something to be 'consumed' and not something that is continually made and remade. Illiteracy in this context is sometimes considered as a 'bad weed' or as a sickness, which is why we hear about it as a 'blight' which must be 'eliminated'.

In the general context of class society, illiterates are treated as chattels, as oppressed individuals who are refused

the right of existence, and are treated accordingly while learning how to read and write. Furthermore, they are not asked to learn things which they can use to increase their knowledge as they become aware of their own limitations, but to passively receive a 'prefabricated knowledge' that has been established once and for all.

In the other case, however, learners are asked to think. In this approach, knowledge does not come as a formula or a 'slogan'. Rather, it is a fundamental way of being for individuals who work to recreate the world which they inherited and, in this process of construction and reconstruction, remake themselves. They are because they are in a process of becoming.

As a creative act, learning how to read and write necessarily implies, in this approach, a critical understanding of reality. Illiterates are called to seize existing knowledge for themselves, based on their concrete practice in the world. Thus, these new avenues to knowledge surpass the old limitations and, by demystifying false interpretations, reveal the causes of facts. When the separation between thought and language and reality no longer exists, then being able to read a text requires a 'reading' of the social context from which it stems. It is not enough to know mechanically the meaning of 'Eve saw the vineyard'. It is necessary to know what position Eve occupies in the social context, who works in the vineyard, and who profits from this work.

Those who defend the neutrality of adult literacy programmes are right in accusing us of political acts when we try to clarify the reality in the context of such a programme. But they also falsify the truth in denying the political aspect of their own efforts to mask reality.



LITERACY AS AN ACT OF MEANING

Raja Roy Singh

Once regarded as the inculcation of mechanical skills, literacy work with adults is increasingly seen as an educational process based on dialogue

Adult illiterates were long regarded as people who were suffering from a kind of disease from which they could be cured by learning to read and write. They were thought to be devoid of higher order cognitive characteristics and to lack the capacity for abstraction, reasoning and symbolization. Shackled to their immediate experience, they had no conception of past or future. They were mentally *tabula rasa* and somewhat childish. The acquisition of literacy was a leap across the great divide from the "illiterate mentality" to the "literate mentality".

These myths have been extremely potent. They helped to create a psychological climate in which society is seen as divided into a dominant class and a subservient mass. This attitude, whether implicit or openly held, gave rise to methods of teaching literacy in which adult illiterates are seen as passive objects to be salvaged by the literacy process, in which they need not intervene until they have mastered the salvatory words in the right way and at the right time. This "salvatory" literacy practice is almost exclusively based on the technical drills of reading and writing and often uses the same methods and texts which are used for children in their early grades at school.

It is often forgotten that many illiterate adults have an oral cultural heritage which is profoundly important to them and that the ways in which their oral traditions are stored, renewed and transmitted have

shaped their perceptions and the languages in which they think. Furthermore, in most of the societies to which they belong, literacy is not new. In some cases it has formed part of creative and religious life for centuries.

These adults have acquired an array of educational experiences, competences and values in their families, in social groups, in places of work and entertainment, and in acts of worship. They have had to learn lessons relating to community life and understand the values and rules associated with their occupations. All these experiences give meaning to their lives and all of them involve uninterrupted language learning. Literacy work that does not recognize these facts and sets out to teach adults to read and write by rendering them meaningless to themselves is an exercise in sterility and serves the economic and social forces that marginalize people and deprive them of their voice.

Literacy is only authentic if it adds meaning to people's lives and helps them to understand real-life problems. If there is no link between literacy practice and the situation of the learners, there will be indifference, resistance and rejection.

Literacy as a Dynamic Process

Radically new ideas and perspectives on literacy have been developed in recent decades. Literacy is no longer viewed as a simple concept bound up with the coding and decoding of signs in which the main problems are technical. The literacy process is no longer conceived of as a training process which

concentrates exclusively on "implanting" specific mechanical skills; it is now recognized as an educational process, as an unfolding of human potential.

The exponents of these new approaches do not use the same terminology and emphasize different aspects of the literacy process but they have certain points in common.

Firstly, they recognize that adult learners have a central role in the process and should be active in defining their learning needs and the goals which they serve.

Secondly, they regard learning as a continuous, integral and deepening process of critical awareness of the self within and the world without.

Thirdly, they see diversity and not uniformity or homogeneity as the true characteristic of literacy action.

Fourthly, this "dynamic literacy process" finds its full expression in engaging and participating in authentic social change and developments.

As the Brazilian sociologist and educator Paulo Freire has said, "The literacy process must relate **speaking the word to transforming reality and to man's role in the transformation.**"

The common scheme which breaks down the literacy process into stages—pre-literacy learning to read and write, post-literacy—distorts understanding of the process.

Literacy proceeds **from** the learner, and the impetus for it has its origin in a diversity of sources in which the situations of the learner have a profound influence. In the ultimate analysis, the "literacy need" arises in the individual or social group with a realization, however inarticulate, of a sense of disharmony or incompleteness in its particular social "universe" of relations, meanings and interpretations. As the individual or group becomes consciously aware of the disharmony of its own closed "universe", the literacy process as a reaching out to

new meanings and interpretations begins, transforming the individual/group into **learners.**

The Role of Dialogue

Learning to read and write is not an isolated act, nor is its goal only the acquisition of certain coding and decoding skills. Indeed, it is a relatively easy task for an adult to "alphabetize" himself if he sees a worthwhile purpose to it. It is part of a larger human process in which perceiving, knowing, reflection and action are interwoven. Not least, it is an act that transforms the learner in the very process by which the learner becomes aware of the need and possibilities of change. Along the path from the first stirring of a sense of disharmony to a state of self-appraising comprehension, the learner becomes aware of the "necessity" to learn to read and write and thus to enter a wider field of participation and sharing.

The prime method in the dynamic literacy process is that of dialogue. Whether it is used in identifying the generative themes or in heightening awareness or in developing instructional texts and methods, dialogue defines the relationship between the learners and the teacher, between them both and the realm of knowledge, and between the oral and written means of communication. One of the creative insights of profound significance that dynamic literacy practice has contributed to the general education process is the restoration of dialogue to a central role in education. The mediation of the dialogue process establishes between learners and educators a relationship of equality. It encourages the learners to raise questions and unmask problems relating to significant aspects of their lives.

Literacy action proceeds from, builds on and comes to fruition in a deepening human awareness, what in Freirian terms is known as conscientization. Its best expression is an accompanying sense of

growing autonomy and freedom.

Literacy action which proceeds from the learner is inconceivable in any but a decentralized way. This means a decentralized development structure capable of

responding to the diversity of needs at the local level and, most important, capable of creating the mechanisms at the local level through which the literacy process is sustained.



LITERACY—AN UN- ENDING DEBATE

Prof. Ramlal Parikh

Even after 44 years of Independence and despite 1990 having been observed as the INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR by the United Nations, the debate, whether literacy is an apriori need for the people of India, continues unabated. In the International Literacy Year several solemn declarations were made in our country promising to eradicate illiteracy in about five years, atleast for the 15-35 age-group, that accounts for over 110 million persons. But these declarations have not led to a national resolve to give top-most priority to this fundamental need of millions of our people. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) established in the year 1988, tried to transform itself as one of the five technological missions through which eradication of illiteracy from India was to be secured in the shortest possible time. But the literacy movement in India continues to be the victim of the cynicism of some of our intellectuals and pedagogues who are never tired of questioning the need for literacy itself when they find even some apparent inadequacies in the achievements of the literacy movement. Instead of working for alternatives, some of them even relish the denigration of the literacy movement itself.

Gandhiji had warned as far back in 1939, that "illiteracy of the masses was India's sin and shame and must be liquidated." This was a virtual indictment on the handful of educated élite who had the privilege of access to education, but who never thought of sharing it with the community. That literacy is a basic minimum need for the vast masses in rural and urban areas, still continues to be questioned. This is a most tragic phenomenon of our nation-building

endeavour. Is it not enough to shock us that in terms of literacy, India ranks as the 59th country of the world, and nearly 50% illiterates are in India and this number continues to grow rapidly due to unrestrained population growth and massive drop-outs of upto 80% in first 4 years of elementary education? On the other hand, the achievements in crossing the threshold point of 70% literacy, by most of the South Asian countries like Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Burma, Malaysia, Vietnam, etc. in less than two decades should be an eye-opener to us. When will the consciences of our educated wake up? It was expected that the NLM's definition of literacy would reduce the necessity of further debate on the very need and concept of Literacy. The unending conceptual debate without working, to finding out possible ways through which these conceptual postures can be implemented, impairs the very cause of literacy. In 1979, when the NAEP was launched, it was received with indifference and cynicism, and even before it could stabilise, it was wound up. Literacy was included in the RMNP programme, and later it was removed. Again it was brought into the 20-Point programme. The National Literacy Mission which is barely two and a half years old also seems to be facing a critical challenge to its need and existence. There seems to be an itching eagerness to find fault with the literacy movement rather than finding concrete alternatives that are applicable on a mass scale. A class of researchers and pedagogues has emerged, who are always anxious to establish the inadequacies of this

programme, which are so obvious that they hardly need to be investigated.

To our great dismay and agony the latest statement denigrating the value of literacy has (may be unknowingly) come from a very respectable Review Committee on National Policy on Education. The Committee is headed by one of our most distinguished and original thinkers and educationists, Shri Acharya Ramamurti. There are some most eminent educationists in the Committee who have given their whole life for education of our people. I have great respect for all of them. The Committee's perspective paper on Education, under the title "Towards an Enlightened Human Society" is a very illuminating document. The paper has suggested many welcome changes in our education system, both in content and structure. Decentralisation of education management, opening up and non-fomalising the school system, common school system, integration of S.U.P.W. in every subject, reduction of public examinations, developing Indian languages, vocationalisation of the entire Secondary Education from the beginning, are all most welcome thrusts.

But one feels seriously disturbed and shocked to find that in this most elevating paper, despite its statement that the Committee does not intend to romanticise illiteracy, the total effect of Para-7 of the prologue and Para-5 of Focus on issues is **nothing less than romanticisation of illiteracy as it gives the clear impression that literacy is dispensible and that an enlightened and human society can be achieved without the total eradication of illiteracy.** It seems Adult Literacy and Adult Education are being considered as two alternatives from which one is to be chosen. When there is an inescapable need of declaring relentless war on illiteracy, the Committee's exhortation to avoid disproportionate emphasis on literacy campaigns, sounds very odd and negative. It will be readily admitted that there is a great scope for

improving the content and methodology of literacy campaigns. **But adult literacy and adult education are not alternatives; they are two stages in education.** Literacy is the first stage, an entry-point and a tool for acquiring information in the modern knowledge-based society. In the contemporary age where knowledge is power, how can we ignore the need to equip the large mass of our people with the tools of literacy? Does it need evidence to prove that illiteracy has proved to be a serious impediment and deprivation for the large mass of our people? Has it not contributed to the perpetuation of their lack of empowerment?

It is true that our people have a very powerful common sense, **but it is equally true that their exploitation has been perpetuated because of their inability to read and write.** They continue to be deprived of their minimum wages, and even their access to the measures or limiting the population and to health services etc. Time and again Kerala's high literacy rate is quoted to demonstrate the role of literacy as an effective instrument of people's empowerment. The masses continue to be deceived in several spheres as they cannot go beyond thumb impression, even while exercising their right of franchise. How can we then think of leaving adult illiteracy to its own fate? How can we hold that those who missed the bus of literacy due to socio-economic handicaps and the consequent inability to join or continue in school, should continue to be penalised as illiterates for their entire life? Are not the numbers of the adult illiterate in the age group of 15 plus staggering? There are about 245 million illiterates in the 15 plus age-group, and nearly 114 millions among the youth, age-group of 15-35. This is therefore not merely a question of adult literacy but substantially a question of youth-literacy. Nor should we forget the fact that 2/3 of our illiterates are women.

Is there not a serious fallacy in the argument that Universalisation of Primary Education will solve the problem in the future? There is abundant evidence in the experience of the last 44 years to show that when parents are illiterate they do not encourage their children to go to school, they even discourage them from going to school. The question is not what is more important – primary education or adult literacy. Both are essential and both are two sides of the same coin. There is no need to put one against the other as though they are alternatives. Even literacy per se is a must for all whether children or adult-youth. It is an universal minimum requirement in the contemporary age, atleast for all those who are in the age group of 15 to 35 or 40. Literacy should be a 'first thing first' programme and the acquisition of reading and writing skills should be given in the shortest possible time, and in the simplest and most unsophisticated manner, through nation-wide door to door mass-campaign. Formal pedagogic methods may not work well. But learner oriented, community-based and time-bound peripatatic approach has a much greater chance of success.

As literacy is an entry-tool, the process has never been conceived as a terminal point with the acquisition of the basic skills of three R's. Education in any form is a life-long process. Once the people's confidence is generated in their ability to use the tool of the three R's a very rapid and widespread access to reading books meant for neo-literates should follow. Thus, the three R's have to be applied simultaneously for a true comprehension

of their ability towards one's own empowerment. The JSN of NLM is a welcome innovation. But it is too marginal and needs to be strengthened much more. These and the non-formalisation and secular communicisation of all educational institutions, will ensure sustenance of literacy.

The time-factor is so crucial in this that adult literacy cannot be kept waiting until a natural demand is generated or until universal primary education is achieved. We have lost more than four decades in debating the concept and methods of literacy and researching its failures. It is high time that educational establishments are obliged to undertake the responsibility of securing basic literacy to all people in their surrounding community, say, within an approximate radius of one kilometer of their location, a year or two and continue to work for their further education through community-centres located in every school or college. The 'Educated' in India must first perform this fundamental duty to the people. Even researchers need to gain a first-hand experience of conducting literacy work before they even design their investigation. **How can we afford the luxury of prolonged debate on the very need and concept of literacy when millions of illiterates continue to swell at an incomprehensible speed?** This plea is not intended to justify inadequacies of existing literacy programme or to oppose any type of debate on form of methodology of literacy. **What I am concerned is that now atleast all should plead the priority need for literacy.**

LITERACY AS EMPOWERMENT

Lalita Ramdas

As we stand on the threshold of a Decade for Literacy, it is a time for critical reflection on our past experiences in Adult Education and Literacy practice, if the future is to fulfil the promises that have been made.

Today, we are facing a growing problem of illiteracy — both functional and absolute. Surprisingly it is not only limited to the developing world, but is also to be seen in industrialised countries. It is truly a paradox that in an era where we have seen some of the swiftest and most sophisticated developments in sciences and technology, we are also silent witnesses to the phenomenon of millions and millions of human beings who cannot read and write. This is clearly unacceptable in a milieu where the written word is increasingly becoming a vital medium of information exchange and communication.

For someone like myself, who has worked for over a decade in the field of Literacy and Development at the grass roots, the spectre of growing illiteracy in my country (namely 50% of the world's illiterates nearly 1 billion people), raises some uncomfortable and disturbing questions.

Who are these people who remain illiterate today?

What is their place and visibility in the mainstream?

What factors and forces — Social, Economic and political prevent people from access to learning?

These questions deserve honest answers. And the experience of most of us adult educators points to a symbiotic relationship between illiteracy and the margin-

alisation of people — be it social, economic or political. This linkage is very clear in countries and societies like ours where we do not have to look too far beyond our own doorsteps to see that it is those who are poor and exploited, who are also powerless and illiterate.

It is in this context therefore that 'Literacy as Empowerment' becomes particularly significant in determining the strategies required to combat mass illiteracy wherever it is to be found.

LITERACY, DEVELOPMENT AND POWER

Whether in India and the third world, or in the advanced industrialised first world, it is necessary for us to analyse and understand the historical reasons whereby large sections of people developed into more or less powerful societies. The impact of colonialism; the rise of capitalism; and the phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution; all these have contributed to the present imbalances in the world, and which in turn influence and patterns of development and literacy — illiteracy. Large areas of Asia, Africa, and S. America were ruthlessly exploited by European colonisers seeking wealth, leaving a legacy of mass poverty, hunger, ill-health, unemployment and illiteracy. There was also a concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the small elite and in post-independence time it is this same elite that continues to wield phenomenal economic, social and political clout today. The structures of a stratified and unequal society have not changed despite a socialist constitution, and a democratic electoral system. Herein lies the biggest contradiction — the

masses have been successfully used by the political machinery as vote banks, thereby providing the illusion of power, but in fact, there is no real power in the hands of the people at large.

EMPOWERMENT AND LITERACY REDEFINED

If this nation is to truly wage a successful battle against illiteracy in the ten years ahead, it is essential that we stop viewing illiteracy and illiterates as a bundle of data, statistics and numbers. By so doing, we tend to distance ourselves from the true nature and the ugly face of the **Reality** which lies at the root of the problem of mass illiteracy.

"500 million illiterate in India by the year 2000 AD."

It makes dramatic headlines, but is also encourages us to shrug our shoulders and turn away from the problem, because it is too large, too difficult and too abstract if seen as a game of numbers. It is all too easy to see this as the responsibility of someone else 'out there' — the government, the politicians, the social workers, the educationists. Anyone except ourselves! It is hard to accept that you and I, and our children have got our own education at the cost of many of these others who could not afford the luxury of 'studying' for ten or twenty years, leave alone for a minimum period at primary school. Perhaps we ought to force ourselves to ask the question **Why** so many human beings in today's world are denied the fundamental human right to read and write? Do such large numbers of people **Voluntarily choose** to remain illiterate? **Who** are they?

Both Empowerment and Literacy need careful redefinition. Today the word **Empowerment** has itself become co-opted as part of 'radical' jargon which is used freely and indiscriminately and is capable of innumerable interpretations depending on who you are, and your place in the complex socio-economic pyramid.

I shall therefore, attempt to project this

word 'empowerment?' from the perceptions of those who are themselves illiterate and powerless, because of economic, social and political marginalisation in every sense of the word. We also need to understand that people are not poor because they are illiterate but that they are illiterate because they are poor.

Why Should We Become Literate?

When the National Adult Education Programme was launched in 1977-78, Satyen Maitra of the Bengal Social Service League put together the strongly articulated views of a group of illiterate learners in the form of a prose—poem called "**Why Should We Become Literate?**" This powerful and moving testimony of the people's perception and questions is as relevant today as when it was written. It is an eloquent and clear definition of both Literacy and Empowerment.

Let us look at Who these people are by giving them faces and names and voices and using the language of the poem from the Bengal learners.

Ganga works in 6 to 8 houses in my colony — washing clothes, cleaning utensils, sweeping and swabbing floors day after day. Ten to twelve hours of poorly paid labour, followed by the endless domestic chores from which there is no escape — all this to eke out an existence with which to feed herself and her three children. She began working at the age of seven, never went to school, and now is forced to put her own girls to work. She asks:

"What kind of people are we? We are poor, very poor

But we are not stupid.

That is why, despite our illiteracy,

We still exist.

But we have to know.

Why we should become literate?"

Can Literacy help us live

a little better? Starve a little less?

Would it guarantee that the mother

and the daughter won't have to share
the same sari between them.
Whould it fetch us a newly thatched
roof
over our heads?"

Salim — a fisherman from Kerala, spends
most of his life in his little catamaran — or
boat, to bring in a meagre catch of fish,
after the big trawlers have plundered the
best of the wealth of the sea. He cannot
read and write. He was out fishing with his
father from the time he was a little boy
and his own sons do likewise. He went to
literacy classes, but gave up very soon.
And like many other learners from other
parts of the country he has this to say:

"What they taught us was useless
To sign one's name means nothing,
To read a few words mean nothing.
We agree to join the classes
if you teach us how not to depend
on others any more."

"Why do our teachers feel so superior?
They behave as if we are ignorant fools
As if we are little children.
We are not empty pitchers.
We have minds of our own
We can reason things out
and, believe it or not
We also have dignity."

Shanti rolls beedis in Andhra, as does
Hira Bai in Maharashtra. Both live in
backward villages; their husbands have
left for the city in search of jobs. They
have to feed themselves and their
children. The local school has no building
and no teacher, so their children hardly
study. They will be tomorrow's adult
illiterates. A local NGO started night
classes and both women went for a while.
But they too have questions:

"We don't get a square meal
We have few clothes
We don't have proper shelter
And to top it all, floods come
And wash away everything.
Then comes a long spell of drought
drying up everything.
Would it help if we become literate?"

We are weak and ill very often.
Will the programme teach us
How to take care of our health.
and become strong?
If it does, then we shall come.
Would literacy help us know the laws
that have changed the status of
women?
And the laws that protect the tribals
amongst us?"

Bhim Singh came to the city from
Eastern UP in search of a job so that he
could send money back to his parents,
wife and children who could barely get a
yield out of their small tract of land. He
breaks stones in the quarries from dawn
to dusk and barely gets a minimum
wage. He is too exhausted physically, and
justifiably sceptical of the literacy classes:

"Would it help us know
how to raise our yield, and increase
our income?
And from where could we borrow
money
on easy terms, and what benefits
Would we get from the co-operatives?
Would we get better seeds, fertilisers
and all the water we need?
Would we get proper wages?
And this we think is learning for living."

Devi is a child bride — forced under a
ghunghat and into responsibility at an
age when our daughters are in school
and singing and dancing in relative
freedom.

The list is endless, the names and faces
are those that we see, and meet and yet
ignore, every day, the overworked
woman, the urban slum child, the beaten
wife, the exploited tribal, the bonded
labourer, the migrant worker—one and all
in their own way and in their own
languages are asking the same questions:

"They say that the new programme
Promises things like this.
But is it only writing on a scrap of paper?
It is only like one of those very many
past promises that were never kept?"

Will this programme teach us how to think
 and work together?
 Will 'doing' be made a part of 'learning'?
 If all this is done, all of us
 will join the literacy classes.
 It will then be
 learning to live a better life
 We want a straight answer.
 Then we shall decide whether
 We should become literate or not.
 But if we find out that we
 are being duped again
 with empty promises
 We will stay away from you.
 We will say
 'For God's sake, leave us alone!'

The challenge to each of us is clear and unmistakable. What are its implications in terms of future literacy strategies?

FUTURE STRATEGIES — LESSONS OF THE PAST

Any crusade for literacy will have to be considered first as a political project and not merely as an educational one. As Paulo Freire has said, "this kind of crusade or campaign is not a pedagogical program with political implications; rather it is a political project with pedagogical implications." Let us also understand the context in which I use the word 'Political', since it is so easily misinterpreted! it is perhaps best understood as explained by Fr. Cardenal, the Jesuit Director of the Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade.

"Politics is the science that is concerned about all the people who live in our nation—Politics, in its true sense, is a science completely opposed and antagonistic to the selfish, egocentric attitude which gives rise to exploitation — We believe that politics is the art of assuring that all people in this nation progress. We believe that our education is not only political but is based on the political sense that attempts to build a world of justice and community — is concerned with transforming the degrading living conditions to which fellow human beings are

subjected—and is part of the noble quest and struggle of humanity for dignity and justice."

Most of us practitioners in the field have realised that no education **Is or Can be** politically **Neutral**. You are either **For** or **Against** certain structures and vested interests in society, and that translates into a clear vision of the kind of society we want to build. Therefore, working for literacy goes well beyond the teaching of the three R's. It means working with, and enabling people to challenge and change unjust laws, violence and oppression in the family, exploitative situations at work. It means taking stands yourself, and enabling and empowering others to take stands. It means teaching children, women and others to learn to ask questions rather than blind acceptance—be it of the teacher's words or the written word. It means redesigning content, re-examining materials and curriculum, re-evaluating our training and communication techniques, to be able to reach out in a language and idiom which makes the learners and their lives central, and which is relevant to their needs.

In Conclusion

A relationship of equality, participation and mutual respect is a basic prerequisite for any work in adult education and literacy. This alone could reinforce the democratic progress and further empower people. The collective experiences of many groups and countries provides enough data to tell us that people are capable of learning and wanting to learn — but they have to be convinced that their place in the economic, social and political life of the society and nation is equal to that of every other citizen. This equality must be experienced and not merely remain as a constitutional paper promise. Literacy must empower for organisation and resistance, **so long, in their ability to bring about change in power relationships in the world around them.**

While ideologies and methodologies may differ, a fundamental promise remains: namely the factor of fairplay, justice and dignity for all. If Literacy can enable every woman, every man and every child in this society to walk with heads held high, to be fearless and confident — that then is the real definition of Literacy as a tool for Empowerment. Reading and writing skills should empower people to read and write their world, understand what goes on in that world, and where necessary, transform that world.



MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM OF ILLITERACY IN INDIA

Prem Chand

MEANING OF ILLITERACY

To determine the magnitude of illiteracy, it is essential to define the meaning and scope of illiteracy. According to the latest Census definition, a person is deemed as literate if he or she can read and write with understanding in any language. A person who can merely read but cannot write is not literate. Any person who is not literate according to the above definition of literacy, is an illiterate person. In the earlier censuses, it was the practice to work out literacy rate taking into account the total population. At a later stage, effective literacy rates were also worked out with reference to the population aged 5 years and above. 1991 Census has, however, for the first time brought out literacy rates for the population aged 7 years and over in its Provisional Population Totals itself.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

The 1991 Census, on the request of Department of Education, Government of India, treated children of the age-group 0-6 (below 7 years), as illiterate since the ability to read and write with understanding is not generally achieved by the children of this age. It is worthwhile in this regard to know the practice followed in some of the Asian countries. Pakistan which worked out literacy rate for total population as well as population of 5 years and above during 1951 and 1961 Censuses changed to age-group of 10 years and above for 1972 and 1981 Censuses. Bangladesh takes into account population aged 5 years and above.

Literacy rates in Nepal are based on the population aged 6 years and above. In Thailand and China, literacy rates are based on population of age-groups of 10 years and above and 12 years and above respectively. Vietnam adopts the age group 7 to 50 years. Different practices are followed in different countries. Count down of illiterates starts from 5 years of age to 12 years of age. However, the UNESCO Office of Statistics collects, compiles, collates and projects literacy/illiteracy rates only for the adult population aged 15 years and above. In this article, I propose to present the magnitude of illiteracy in India with reference to (a) Total Population (b) Population aged 5 years and above (c) Population aged 7 years and above and (d) Population aged 15 years and above. Available census data has been used. I have also made some estimates/projections to make comparable data available for the country as a whole.

TOTAL POPULATION

Population of the country is increasing rapidly. It has gone up from 361 million in 1951 to 844 million by 1991 at an exponential growth rate of about 2% per annum. At this rate it may cross the 1000 million mark by 2000 AD. Increasing educational facilities have not been able to keep pace with the growth of population. Number of literates has gone up during this period from 60 million in 1951 to 364 million in 1991. But still number of illiterates of all age groups has also simultaneously increased though at

a decreasing rate from 300 million to 480 million. The table below gives the decadal growth of population and literacy/ illiteracy during this period :

**Decadal Growth of Population & Literacy/ Illiteracy 1951-1991—India—
Total Population**

(In millions)

Year	Population	Literates	Illiterates
1951	361.1	60.2	300.9
1961	439.2 (21.6)	105.5 (75.2)	333.7 (10.9)
1971	548.2 (24.8)	161.4 (53.0)	386.8 (15.9)
1981	685.2 683.3*	247.6 246.5*	437.6 436.8*
	(24.6)	(52.7)	(12.9)
1991	843.9 (23.5)	364.2** (47.7)	479.7 (9.8)

N.B. : Figures in Bracket indicate percentage of decadal growth.

* Revised on the basis of interpolated data for Assam.

** Relates to age group 7 and above and includes estimates for J&K. There are no literates in 0-6 age group.

It is observed that during 1981-91, while population grew by 23.5%, number of literates increased by 47.7% and the number of illiterates also increased by 9.8%. Over the decades, number of literates is increasing by more than 50 per cent, increase in the number of illiterates which is around 10 per cent has also been causing a great concern. It was in this context that the following statement was made in the publication, "Challenge of Education — A Policy Perspective."

"If there is no change in the rate of growth of population and the rate of spread of literacy, there would be 500 million illiterates in India in the year 2000 AD."

This statement made in the year 1985 still holds good. But since this data, pertaining to total population, does not represent the real situation of illiteracy, we may look into this problem with reference

to other age-groups also.

AGE GROUP 5 YEARS AND OVER

Though the provisional population totals and the Primary Census Abstracts for 1971 and 1981 Censuses indicated literacy rates for the population of all age groups, the children below the age of 5 years were considered as illiterate by definition and the literacy question was not canvassed for them. Age group data was not available at the time of publication of Provisional Population Totals and the Primary Census Abstracts. The so called "Effective Literacy Rates" were separately worked out after the age group data became available. But the literacy rates for the total population were mostly used. Number of literates and illiterates of the age group 5 and over and their percentage to the corresponding population for the different census years is given below :

Number of literates/illiterates and their percentage to corresponding population 1951-91 — Age group 5 and over

(In millions)

Year	Literates	Illiterates
1951	55.3 (18.3)	246.6 (81.7)
1961	105.5 (28.3)	267.2 (71.7)
1971	161.4 (34.4)	307.2 (65.6)
1981*	246.7* (41.3)	350.8* (58.7)
1991 (Estimated)	364.2** (49.2)	376.0 (50.8)

* Including estimates for Assam.

** Relates to age group 7 and above. No literates in age group 0-6. Estimates for J&K included.

N.B. : Figures in brackets indicate percentage to the corresponding population.

It is observed from the above table that the number of literates is the same except for 1951 as given in first Table. This

phenomenon is explained by the fact that during these censuses, all children below the age of 5 years were considered as illiterate and were not included among literates (two preceding tables). Number of illiterates has substantially gone down by excluding the children below 5 years of age. This has also resulted in slightly higher literacy rates as the rates have been worked out with reference to the corresponding population of age group 5 and over while the number of literates has remained the same. Magnitude of illiteracy has gone down from a staggering figure of about 480 million to 376 million. This is based on an estimate of about 104 million children of below 5 years of age forming 12.3% of the total population. Exact data will be available after the age group data is analysed and published.

AGE GROUP 7 YEARS AND ABOVE

According to Provisional Population Totals of 1991, literate population aged 7 years and above for India excluding Jammu & Kashmir, where Census has not taken place was 361.71 million. By adding an estimated 2.53 million literates for J&K, the total number of literates for India comes to 364.24 million. This forms 52% of the estimated population of 700.47 million of the age group 7 and above. Number of illiterates of this age group forming 48 per cent of the estimated population as given above comes to 336 million. Compared to the estimated illiterates of 314 million in 1981 of the corresponding age group including estimates for Assam and J&K, the absolute number of illiterates has gone up by about 22 million and the decadal growth rate works out to 7 per cent. Table below indicates change in literacy/illiteracy situation during 1981-91 for the population aged 7 years and above.

**Change in Literacy Situation
for Population Aged 7 years and above
(In millions)**

Year	Literates	Illiterates	Percentage of Literacy
1981*	242.0	314.2	43.5
1991*	364.2	336.2	52.0
Increase in 1991 over 1981			
1981	122.2 (50.5)	22.0 (7.0)	8.5

(Figures in paranthesis indicate percentage of decadal growth)

* Include estimates for Assam and J&K.

Of the 364 million literates of the age group 7 and above, number of female literates is only 132 million. The ratio of female literates to male literates is 4:7. 205 million illiterate females form 61% of the total illiterates. Literacy rate among them is only 39.4 per cent as compared to 63.9 per cent among males.

Census data 1991 gives number of literates for the age group 7 and above. But the corresponding population for this age group has not become available so far. The Registrar General's Office has worked out literacy rates on the basis of estimated population. On the basis of these literacy rates and the number of literates given in Provisional Population Totals, estimated population has been worked out for different States/Union Territories. On the basis of these estimates of population and the number of literates, number of illiterates has also been

worked out. State/Union Territory wise break-up of the estimated population, number of literates/illiterates and percentage of literacy for 7 years and above age population is given below.

(In million)

S. No.	State	Population*	Literate	Illiterate	Percentage of literacy
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1.	Andhra Pradesh	55.07	24.84	30.23	45.11
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	0.68	0.28	0.40	41.22
3.	Assam	18.03	9.63	8.40	53.42
4.	Bihar	69.68	26.86	42.82	38.54
5.	Goa	1.02	0.78	0.24	76.96
6.	Gujarat	34.91	21.26	13.65	60.91
7.	Haryana	13.43	7.43	6.00	55.33
8.	Himachal Pradesh	4.29	2.73	1.56	63.54
9.	Jammu & Kashmir**	6.33	2.53	3.80	40.00
10.	Karnataka	37.64	21.07	16.57	55.98
11.	Kerala	25.01	22.66	2.35	90.59
12.	Madhya Pradesh	54.07	23.49	30.58	43.45
13.	Maharashtra	67.88	42.80	25.08	63.05
14.	Manipur	1.47	0.90	0.57	60.96
15.	Meghalaya	1.43	0.69	0.74	48.26
16.	Mizoram	0.57	0.46	0.11	81.23
17.	Nagaland	1.01	0.62	0.39	61.30
18.	Orissa	26.59	12.91	13.68	48.55
19.	Punjab	17.42	9.95	7.47	57.14
20.	Rajasthan	35.09	13.62	21.47	38.81
21.	Sikkim	0.33	0.19	0.14	56.53
22.	Tamil Nadu	47.68	30.38	17.30	63.72
23.	Tripura	2.27	1.37	0.90	60.39
24.	Uttar Pradesh	112.37	46.87	65.50	41.71
25.	West Bengal	56.69	32.72	23.97	57.72
26.	A & N Islands	0.23	0.17	0.06	73.74
27.	Chandigarh	0.54	0.43	0.11	78.73
28.	D & N Haveli	0.115	0.045	0.07	39.45
29.	Daman & Diu	0.08	0.06	0.02	73.58
30.	Delhi	7.82	5.95	1.87	76.09
31.	Lakshadweep	0.04	0.03	0.01	79.23
32.	Pondicherry	0.68	0.51	0.17	74.91
	India	700.47	364.24	336.23	52.00

* Estimated on the basis of literacy rates.

** Estimated.

It is observed that half (53.3%) of the illiterates of the country are concentrated in four States of UP (65.50 million), Bihar (42.82 million), Madhya Pradesh (30.58 million) and Andhra Pradesh (30.23 million) each of these having more than 30 million illiterates. Another 7 States having illiterates between 10 to 30 million each, Maharashtra (25.08 million), West

Bengal (23.97 million), Rajasthan (21.47 million), Tamil Nadu (17.30 million), Karnataka (16.57 million), Orissa (13.68 million) and Gujarat (13.65 million) account for another two-fifths (39.2%) of the total illiterates. Only 10.5 per cent of the illiterates of the country reside in the remaining 21 States/UTs. Literacy rates on the other hand indicate that 10 States/UTs namely, Bihar (38.54%), Rajasthan (38.81%), D&N Haveli (39.45%), Jammu & Kashmir (40%), Arunachal Pradesh (41.22%), Uttar Pradesh (41.7%), Madhya Pradesh (43.45%), Andhra Pradesh (45.11%), Meghalaya (48.26%) and Orissa (48.55%) have yet to reach the national level and are having more illiterates than literates.

AGE GROUP 15 YEARS AND ABOVE

To compare the magnitude of illiteracy in India with the world situation or with some other developing countries of the world, it is essential to analyse literacy/illiteracy situation for adult population aged 15 years and above. Census data on literacy brought out in the Social and Cultural Tables gives literacy rates by different groups. These tables are normally published after 6 to 7 years of the year of conducting the census. Data from 1981 Census on the basis of Social and Cultural Tables became available only during 1987. For 1991 also this data will not be available at least for one or two years. The same has therefore been estimated on the basis given below.

Expectation of life at birth in India is increasing slowly and definitely. Consequently the proportion of older population is increasing and that of younger population is decreasing. Children below 15 years of age formed 42% of the population in 1971. In 1981 their proportion went down to 39.5% and it was projected to be about 36% for 1991 by the Expert Committee on Population. On the basis of this projection, population of the age group 15 and over in 1991 works out to about 540 million. Literacy rate in this age group improved between 6-7 percentage points during each of the

decades 1961-71 and 1971-81. Assuming that the increase during 1981-91 was also at least 7 percentage points, the literacy rate for this age group for 1991 works out to about 48%. No. of literates and illiterates for 1991 on this basis comes to 259 million and 281 million respectively.

Population of the age group 15 and over and literacy/illiteracy situation for census years from 1951 to 1981 and estimates for 1991 are given in the table below :

Literacy/Illiteracy position of the adult population aged 15 years and above
—India
(In millions)

Year	Population	Literates	Illiterates	Literacy Rates
1951	215.34	41.48	173.86	19.26
1961	258.86	71.86	187.00	27.76
1971	317.83	108.32	209.51	34.08
1981*	403.30	164.53	238.77	40.78
1991	540.00	259.00	281.00	48.00
Estimates)				

Include estimates for Assam.

From the above table it is observed that number of literates and the literacy rates for 15 and over age group population has also increased substantially during the last four decades. But the number of illiterates also continues to grow. Our estimates of literacy for the age group 15 and over also tally with the projection of illiteracy situation made by UNESCO Office of Statistics in this regard. They have estimated that in 1990 India has 280 million adult illiterates of the age group 15 and over which form 51.7% of the corresponding population. According to these estimates, India has the highest number of illiterates in the world constituting 29.1% of the total estimated 962.6 million illiterates of the world. These projections also indicate that India and China taken together contain 502 million illiterates which comes to 52% of the world total. Table below gives an idea of the magnitude of the illiteracy in India when the size of illiteracy of the other nine

countries of the world having 10 million or more illiterates aged 15 and over is compared.

Countries with 10 million and more illiterates aged 15 and over
(In millions)

Country	Illiteracy Rate	Illiterates
India	51.7	280.00
China	26.5	222.00
Pakistan	65.1	43.00
Bangladesh	64.7	42.00
Nigeria	49.2	29.00
Indonesia	22.9	27.00
Brazil	18.7	18.00
Egypt	51.5	16.00
Iran	46.0	15.00
Sudan	72.8	10.00
Sub total 10 countries	—	702.00
World Total	26.9	963.00

The table indicates that even though the illiteracy rate is lower than countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sudan, the magnitude of the illiteracy in India in terms of number of illiterates is the highest in the world. Number of illiterates in any other country except China is possibly less than the number of illiterates in the State of Uttar Pradesh in India.

CONCLUSION

India has made substantial progress in improving its literacy rates. However, the fact still remains that India is having largest number of illiterates of the world. Rate of high growth of population and steep drop out rate at the primary stage are mainly responsible for this size of the problem of illiteracy in India. Though the enrolment at the primary stage (Class I – V) is 97.3 million and forms 99.96% of the population of the age group 6-11, the high rate of drop out (only 50 children out of 100 enrolled in Class I reach Class V) forces entry of illiterate children to the adult age group of 15-19. This high rate of drop out was reflected in the statement made in the projections of the illiteracy in the age group 15-19 by the Office of

Statistics UNESCO :

"But what is particularly striking is the predominance of India, which by itself accounted for 37% of the World Totals in 1970, and will account for 54.90% in the year 2000.... In spite of relatively high and increasing enrolment ratios, the primary schools in India are failing to reduce the flow of illiterate youth into the ranks of adult illiterates".

It is at this stage that we have to see that the children from the age group 6-14 do not enter adulthood without being literate and if at all they enter, they are made literate through the adult education programme as soon as it is possible to do so. Programmes of nonformal education for the age group 9-14 and the total literacy campaigns for the adult population of 15-35 age group taken up by the Government are the steps in this direction. The number of illiterates for the year 1990-91 as estimated in this article and projected by UNESCO Office of Statistics are based on the past trend. It is, however, hoped that their number will be less than 280 million when the efforts of 1981-91 decade are reflected in the actual data to be published through the Social and Cultural Tables of 1991.



PREPARATION OF NEED-BASED POST- LITERACY MATERIALS

—A FEW OBSERVATIONS—

—Satyen Maitra

There has been a significant conceptual development of adult literacy from alphabetization to enhanced awareness and functional literacy which, to use the UNESCO definition, is "required for effective functioning of the literacy group and community and also for enabling them to continue reading and writing and calculation for their own and their community's development". To attain this objective in a successful literacy programme, we should have as a necessary concomitant, provision for adequate quantity of graded post-literacy materials. **A programme of large scale adult literacy should not be started unless there is an assured supply of post-literacy and follow-up materials.**

In India, a tremendous thrust to the spread of literacy is given with the help of the National Literacy Mission which, happily, has taken cognizance of the importance of post-literacy by setting up Jana Sikshan Nilayams which are meant to cater to the needs of the limited literates to help them reach the stage of the new reading public.

The library system in the country is also, to a certain extent, going to be revamped to make it responsive to the reading interest of the neo-literates. All these are praise-worthy measures. But in our country (and in most of the other Third-World countries), **there is a wide distance between what is prescribed or recommended and its actual implementation.** One of the major fallacies in

our thinking is that we tend to think that reality is pliable and will adapt itself somehow to the measures which we consider desirable—as if there is a spontaneous relationship between good intentions and their translation into practice! This happens because we are nurtured, as Walter Lierman says 'in a climate of educational optimism'. Unfortunately, the prescriptions continue to remain at the verbal level and corresponds minimally to the object level.

We should peer closer to the level of reality and try to identify some of the problems and constraints which are responsible for this dichotomy between the prescription and action. A few of these, by no means exhaustive, are stated below.

First, we need to raise the 'sights' a little and **try to plan preparation of materials to cover all sections** of the limited literates so that even outside the 'protected' structured situations of adult literacy centres, these are acceptable and are able to stand on their own without any kind of props.

Second, we have to remember that mere availability of materials does not **ensure their proper utilisation.** Conscious efforts need to be made to encourage self-reading by the learners even during their literacy courses through organisation of reading clubs, debates, discussions etc.

Third, there is a great urgency to **create**

a literate environment in the rural milieu. To a certain extent, this can be done by using posters and putting up at different points — boards with messages on health, family welfare, environment protection, national integration, women's equality et al with the help of the NSS, NCC, NYKS and other volunteer groups. The JSNs can take a big lead in this direction. The concept is nothing new. It has been tried out in several places. But these fragmentary and isolated efforts must be consolidated to form a common feature in the countryside. This would not only develop the faculty of 'learning by sight' but would also stimulate the urge to reading by the community.

Fourth, there is a dearth of newspapers and periodicals for the limited literates. Newspapers are essential because they ensure daily contact with the printed words with varied materials and can be habit-forming in a very short time. The SRCs, with the help of the DRUs can and should help in bringing out such printed local newspapers.

Fifth, JSNs and Village Community Education Centres (which may be called mini-JSNs) should **regularly organise discussions**, reading clubs (including newspaper reading) etc. to develop reading habit among the people. Discussions and debates can give a big fillip to the use of books.

We have yet to make a proper **survey to ascertain the reading interests** of the neo-literates, but a few suggestions can be ventured.

- We should plan for a multi-media education materials and not only for printed books. Each medium has its own advantage and imaginative combination of different media can be very effective to bring about any behavioural change.
- We should be chary of preparing only the need-based materials, especially when the needs are listed according to our own perception.

—Development-linked contents can come under two categories:

When improvement is possible through the readers' own effort — these include preventive health measures, better nutrition, improved intra-family relationship, gender equality et al.

Where efforts need to be supported by others — for example, in the areas of agriculture, irrigation, co-operatives etc., the learners can do very little without an active counselling group. Preferably, improvements and innovations suggested in the books should be within the easy reach and grasp of the learners.

—Dissemination of information without the development of a scientific and rational attitude has its limitations. There is a great need to dis-adapt the learners from their previously held beliefs and superstitions and to re-adapt them to the needs of a changing society. In this area, printed medium suggesting a few 'do's' and 'don'ts' is not so effective as role plays, popular theatre, puppet plays etc.

—We should bear in mind that the readers living in a grim situation need also to be entertained and taken out of their own gritty surroundings even for a brief spell. To do that, we can draw upon store houses of our own rich literature and re-write them simply and/or persuade our writers to write for these people after being given proper orientation about the prospective readers, their reading ability and the milieu in which they live.

There should be constant evaluation of the materials which are produced. There should be pre-publication evaluation as well as post-publication evaluation. It is only when the readership grows to a significant number, proper feedback from the readers can be expected. Before that, any query as to the reading interests is likely to elicit replies which would be sensitive to prompting and not be very dependable.

Firm points of triangulation are necessary before a proper survey is made about the reading needs and interests of

the neo-literates. Unfortunately, the points at present are not very firm and we need to fix these points strongly.



WHY KEDARI CRIED? DOES ANYONE CARE?

Lakshmidhar Mishra

In the first week of November, 1990 I along with my colleagues had the occasion to watch a film made by Ms. Nalini Singh. It was a happy coincidence that the Producer and Director was also present. The occasion was a seminar on "Education for all in Uttar Pradesh" as a prelude to formulation of a concrete action plan for a project to be funded by the World Bank. The film is about the story of launching a mass campaign for total literacy in the district of Bijapur in North Karnataka. The district is known for its dry and semi-arid conditions as also for bundles of fads, taboos and die-hard obscurantist ideas and practices. Amidst these negative indicators there are couple of silver linings such as a young and energetic Collector—Shri T.M. Vijaya Bhaskar and equally energetic and dynamic Chief Secretary, Zilla Parishad—Shri Vidya Shankar, a rich folk culture and tradition and above all its people who despite poverty, social backwardness and economic deprivation represent one of the finest specimens of humanity—simple honest and guileless. It is precisely on account of this human resource—a reservoir of incredible goodness that the District Administration and the Zilla Parishad were encouraged to light the candle of literacy amidst the accumulated gloom and assumed on their shoulders the massive responsibility of injecting a little cheer and joy in the lives of 5 lakhs of illiterate adults who for no fault of theirs were deprived of the access to educational opportunity at one of the most formative and impressionable years of their life and yet who were in need of it.

Kedari Shivappa Jivajigol belonged to this unfortunate group of men and women. Of 20 years of age, he came from a family of agricultural workers in Babaleswar village of Bijapur taluka. All members in his family—father, mother, 2 brothers and 2 sisters were illiterate. On account of poverty, two of Kedari's brothers had already migrated to Maharashtra. Kedari very much wanted to go to the school along with other boys and girls of his age but was not allowed to do. Kedari's family had 4 acres of non-irrigated land but the prospects of agriculture in dry and semi-arid conditions were not very bright and the family had barely enough to keep their body and soul together. Poverty increased with advancement of years and the culture of helpless dependence on others also acquired deep roots. This led to a process of social alienation which by itself was intimidating and painful. Kedari started sliding lower and lower on the ladder of human development; he and his family members started sinking deeper and deeper into a quagmire. It is at this point of time that the campaign for total literacy came as a streak of light, as a breath of fresh air. Kedari who wanted to attend the school along with others in his young days but could not do so due to the reluctance of his parents saw in the campaign a golden opportunity to learn and through learning to allow his personality to flower to its full bloom. The campaign kindled the desire in him to learn and to join the mainstream as the proud member of a literate society.

The Producer and Director in course of shooting of the film had the occasion to interview Kedari :

“Kedari, did you go to the school at your schoolgoing age?”

“No”.

“Why did you not go to the School?”

Coming from a rank outsider these words pierce through Kedari like an electric current. He receives a jolt. His anguish deepens. But the moment of his anguish also becomes the moment of his resolve. He perceives the need for literacy and internalises the need. In a moment of deep hurt and intense agony, he reflects on himself, on the existential reality of the situation in which he has been helplessly placed and on the causes which have led to his present predicament. He makes up his mind to be a literate being, a whole being and decides to join “**Saksharata Abhiyan**” of Bijapur. Luckily for him a literacy class was being conducted at **Akkuloni** (street) at Babaleswar which was next to his house. Shri H.S. Kaggod becomes his Instructor. The instructor is not very much different from the learner. Both come from the same social background, same cultural milieu, the same life style, the only difference being that the instructor had access to educational opportunity of some level while the learner did not have.

Today Kedari is an altogether different being. Access to the World of Letters has transformed him, his thought process and lifestyle. After 6 months of intensive learning, he has improved his cognitive faculties and learning skills and feels more resilient and confident than ever. His motivation to learn has been heightened and he has developed a critical awareness of himself, of the world around him the forces which envelop and shape his daily life and the symmetry of his existence. He feels that he has acquired the wherewithal to identify the roots of his predicament and the ability to overcome them. He says in a moment of his resolve

“I shall never allow any of the children in my family to be an illiterate member. I shall persuade and cajole all children of my family (my 2 sisters in Bijapur and 2 brothers who have migrated to Maharashtra) to be fully educated.”

WHY did Kedari cry? Kedari cried because the questions put to him by an outsider reminded him of his past, of his poor social background, of the state of his utter helplessness for which he could not go to school despite a burning desire in him to do so. He cried because he was not very confident that he could learn at an advanced age after having been a wastrel in the most formative years of his life. He cried because he felt his male ego was hurt by the individuals around him who did not care to understand his background and psyche before putting the question. He cried because of the callousness, insensitivity and wanton cruelty of the society which knows how to hurt, to deprive and demean without bothering to create opportunities for survival and growth.

(II)

Kedari is not alone in this process of social isolation, economic deprivation and victimisation by a harsh and soulless system. The Human Development Report, 1991 goes to show that on a global plane about a billion adults cannot read or write and 300 million children are not in primary or secondary school. More than 1 million people still live in absolute poverty and one fifth of the population still goes hungry everyday. Over 14 million children die each year before reaching the fifth birthday and 180 million children under five suffer from serious malnutrition, 1.5 million people still lack basic health care and over 1.5 billion people do not have safe water and over 2 billion lack safe sanitation. While this is the general global scenario, the situation in which women are placed is still worse. Half the rural women over 15 are illiterate, women's wages are still only two-thirds of

men's wages, half a million women die each year from causes related to pregnancy and child birth, women are often denied the right to decide whether or when to have children as also the right to own, inherit or control property. Girl's primary enrolment rates are a little half that of boys with a participation and retention rate much lower than that of boys.

(III)

Reverting back to our country, a land of bewildering cultural variety and unity we inherited a system characterised by great disparities based on caste, class and gender divide. The colonial era characterised by a hierarchical society based on status-quoist and acquisitive principles with a strong instinct for self-preservation and without an egalitarian philosophy believed in exclusiveness which prevented the spread of education and equity in access to educational opportunities. It was believed, and most unfortunately, that knowledge is sacred and only the upper caste elite had the exclusive access to it. Secondly, it thrived on a feudal agricultural society characterised by a simple subsistence economy with limited needs which did not perceive the need for universal education and literacy. The limited need for education was in the context of colonial administration which did not go beyond the requirement of clerks, scribes and munshis.

Education as an inalienable human right, as a tool of equality or liberation had not fired the imagination of either the rulers or the administrators of the colonial era and, therefore, it was futile to expect that education as a tool of social mobility and cornerstone of development could pervade, influence and animate the system which thrived on inequality and repression.

Consequently, the country which was once the cradle of civilisation and culture had the dubious distinction of having

hardly five percent rate of literacy in 1901. Shri Dadabhai Naoroji, the veteran freedom fighter was the first to put forth the demand for universalisation of primary education before the Indian Commission on Education in 1882 but the plea went unheeded. Yet another distinguished freedom fighter—Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhle made a fervent but unsuccessful appeal for universal education and literacy before the Imperial Legislative Council in 1910 and 1912. In 1937, Mahatma Gandhi put forth his scheme of basic education under which education of 7 to 8 years duration was to be provided for all children. Its content was built around socially useful productive work. The proposal which was the first indigenous effort to develop a national pattern of education was endorsed by the **Wardha Education Conference** but not by the Imperial Government. The proposition that it is the obligation of the state to provide free and compulsory basic education to all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years had to wait for its acceptance till introduction of the 'Sergent Plan' by Sir John Sergent, the then Education Adviser to the Governor General of India. The Sergent Plan had envisaged realisation of the goal of free and compulsory basic education over an unduly long timespan of 40 years. The timespan was patently unacceptable to the nationalists but the spirit of the Sergent Plan eventually came to be reflected in Chapter IV of the Constitution i.e. in Article 45 of the Directive Principles of the State Policy; "The State shall endeavour to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this Constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years".

(IV)

Since attainment of independence the political and national commitment to universalisation of elementary education, nonformal education for school drop outs and for adults who did not have the

opportunity to go to school and continuing education for development has demonstrated itself beyond doubt. These major components of education have all along been treated as integral part of a larger syndrome, as mutually supportive and inter-dependent, one supporting and reinforcing the other. The national commitment has been evident in increase in the number of educational institutions (primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary), increase in the number of teachers, increase in the gross enrolment of the number of students as also increase in the overall outlay in elementary, primary and non-formal education. Illustratively, the primary schools increased from 2,09,671 in 1950-51 to 5,37,399 in 1986-87 (an increase of 156%). During the same period the number of middle schools increased from 13,596 to 1,37,196 (more than ten fold increase). The number of teachers increased from 5,37,918 in 1950-51 to 15,22,108 in 1986-87 at the primary level and from 85,496 in 1950-51 to 9,79,073 in 1986-87 at the middle level. Equally appreciable has been the progress achieved in enrolment of children. Illustratively, the total enrolment in classes I to V increased from 19.1 million in 1950-51 to 89.9 million in 1986-87. The gross enrolment ratio at the primary stage registered increase from 42.6 in 1950-51 to 95.6 in 1986-87. In terms of outlay, there has been a massive increase from Rs. 93 crores in 1951-56 to Rs. 905.00 crores in 1980-85 and Rs. 2972.63 crores in 1985-90.

The above, however, does not reveal the full story. Beneath the gloss and dazzle of statistics which **John Kurien** goes to term "myths", the sisyphian realities are quite different. Despite a phenomenal expansion in the formal school system, only about half the child population in the age 6-14 years is able to regularly attend, participate and complete elementary education. The Fifth All India Educational Survey

conducted in 1986 shows that there are still as many as 5 crore or 1/3rd of the 15 crore children in the group 6-14 years who are not enrolled in school. Even more striking, it reveals that out of every 100 children admitted in Class I, only 49 complete the primary stage and only 31 the upper primary or elementary level.

The number of working children has been variously estimated. In 1983, the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) put the number of working children i.e. those children who work for a subsistence at 2.1 crores. However, the Operations Research Group (ORG) an independent organisation commissioned by the Ministry of Labour to make an all India study of working children estimated working children at 4.4 crores in the same year. In estimating the number of working children, the O.R.G. took into consideration children who are engaged in activity that does not earn them wages but which nevertheless keeps them working on a whole time basis—girls who perform household duties, fetch fuel and water, look after siblings, boys who assist parents in household entrepreneurial activity, rear cattle and assist in farming. These working children form the majority of those who cannot get education through the vast school network before they complete 14 years of age.

What are the causes and factors which contribute to this unfortunate situation? Before attempting a reply it is worth analysing the incidence and magnitude of child labour in India, its characteristics and peculiarities and how it has negated the laudable goals enshrined in the Constitution in respect of universalisation of elementary education.

(V)

Article 24 of the Constitution provides that "no child below the age of 14 years shall be employed in any hazardous employment". Article 39 (e) and (f) of the Directive Principles of State Policy requires each State to direct its policy

towards ensuring that health and strength of workers, men and women and the tender age of children are not abused'. 'The citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their age or strength', children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner, and 'are protected against exploitation'.

In furtherance of this objective a number of legislations such as the Factories Act, the Mines Act, the Motor Transport Workers Act, the Apprentices Act, the Plantation Labour Act, the Shops and Commercial Establishment Act, the Beedi & Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act and the Employment of Children Act have been enacted. The central focus in all these legislations is to restrict the minimum age of entry to employment and to regulate the conditions of child employment. This has been the subject matter of study of a number of committees such as the National Commission on Labour (1969), the Committee on Employment of Children in India (1977), the Gurupadswamy Committee on Child Labour (1979) and the report of the National Seminar on Child and Law (1982). In several of its judgements and most notably the *Asiad* case, the Supreme Court has expressed its anxiety and concern over employment of children in hazardous operations at a tender age which have shaken our guilty conscience. The incidence of child labour, however, persists and is growing in its number and intensity. There are certain peculiarities which distinguish employment of children labour from employment of other sections of the working population. These are:

Employment of child labour appears to have somewhat disappeared from the organised sector.

Employment of child labour appears to be primarily confined to the unorganised, semi-organised and informal sectors such as small plantations, hotels and restaurants, beedi-rolling, cotton

ginning and weaving, glass and bangle making, carpet weaving, brick kilns, stone quarries, building and construction, handlooms, handicrafts, garages and workshops.

They are both wage-employed and self-employed. The latter category (beedi-rollers, ragpickers etc.) are in effect employed by the contractors and middlemen.

Working children are by and large employed at their hearth and home or near the place of stay, there are instances of children being weaned away by middlemen from their native place either by force or with the implied consent of their parents.

Child labour is basically a phenomenon found in developing countries generally associated with poverty and deprivation. In the communities belonging to lower income groups in developing countries like India, it is difficult to run a family on the income of the parents if the latter are daily rated or piece rated or casual or contract labourers and are unsure of stable avenues of durable employment. In such cases, the income of working children though small in itself assumes much more value. They are encouraged and persuaded to undertake a variety of jobs, both hazardous as well as non-hazardous.

The same factors which give rise to emergence of child labour as an economic phenomenon are also responsible for its perpetuation and for the failure of non-formal education. There are primarily four constraints which emanate from our general policy towards child labour, employer's callousness and insensitivity, parental indifference, overall social structure and milieu characterised by caste and stratification factor. These may be elaborated in the following sequence:

General Policy Towards Child Labour—

At the international level, the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child

made on 20.11.59 lays down that the child shall enjoy special protection and shall be given opportunities and facilities by law and by other means to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.

In pursuance of this Declaration followed by the announcement of the UN Children's Charter, the International Labour Conference has adopted as many as 18 conventions and series of recommendations, the latest in the series being the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and Recommendation (No. 146). These provide comprehensive standard and policy guidelines on the elimination of child labour and the protection of working children.

The Government of India have so far ratified 6 out of 18 conventions adopted by the International Labour Conference for protection of working children and young persons and have enacted as many as 15 legislations to prohibit employment of children in different sectors. The existing policy has been characterised by an admixture of total prohibition of employment of child labour below a particular age and regulation of their employment by specifying certain conditions of service.

This has introduced an element of ambivalence in interpretation and implementation of law. On the one hand, it speaks of prohibition of child labour in hazardous occupations. On the other hand, it acknowledges that child labour is a harsh reality, that its abolition is not easy in the present socio-economic context and therefore, measures should be taken to improve and ameliorate the working conditions of children instead of advocating elimination of child labour.

Conceptually, there may not be anything seriously wrong in adopting certain policy postulates such as putting a ceiling on the age of employment, improving the

conditions of work, regulating the hours of work and payment of wages and developing supplementary programmes including non-formal education programmes for working children. The real problem lies in enforcement of these welfare provisions due to the prevalence of contract labour system. This system is open ended and there are numerous layers and sublayers. Most of the sub-contractors are themselves uneducated and have scant regard for dignity of labour. The stratified structure in the contract labour system is primarily responsible for exploitation of child labour. In such a system the profit margin gets distributed amongst a number of intermediaries and therefore, denial of the barest minimum reasonable facilities and amenities to the employed children to the extent of dehumanisation becomes inevitable. Besides, the working environment of working children by itself may not at all be congenial to provide facilities and amenities for non-formal education.

Employer's Attitude—

The education of working children is generally discouraged by employers. They regard a child worker as a labourer who works for lower wages, who is easily pliable and who does not involve the employer in trade union problems and who particularly in jobs which require soft hands is more efficient than an adult worker. Employers in the organised sector do not wish to lose the juvenile work force and, therefore, discourage education of working children. Instead, they impress on the children on the need to hard work and at times may even give false hopes of upwards lift in career if the children continue in the present job. There is yet another dimension of this problem. Most of the employers in the unorganised or informal sector and particularly in rural areas belong to the upper strata of the society. They harbour a general notion (though mistaken) that the workers start asserting their rights and

would refuse to submit to authority if they and their children were educated. The employers in an agrarian society are also against education of the unlettered rural masses on the ground that this will lead to deterioration of labour relations and usurpation of the system of easy supply of labour.

The working class itself is unsure of the outcome of mass literacy for its members and their children. On the whole, there is no proper understanding or appreciation of the damage caused to children by subjecting them to relentless hard manual labour—whether it is in hazardous or non-hazardous occupations.

Parental Attitude—

In most of the cases, parents feel that a job, even though it is for a short period, is more beneficial than spending years in school. They believe that 4 to 5 years spent on a job at a very small wage would better pay-off than spending these years in school. Moreover, education is not viewed by the parents as promise for a job. Since family environment is not very conducive to build-up academic skills, they fear that children would simply become a liability. This view is reinforced by their observation that a large number of educated youth are unemployed.

One of the common beliefs in India ever since inception of the formal education by British is that education helps one to get a white-collared job. Parents feel that if a child does not get white-collared job when he completes high school, he would remain unemployed as he refuses to take up manual work or a blue-collared job. In order to avoid such a situation, they prefer the child to take up a job in early childhood.

Working Children's Outlook—

Like their parents, working children look upon their job as training for skill or an experience for getting better jobs at higher wages. Most of them regard schooling as a boring and drudgerous experience. They feel that the curriculum

is not job-oriented and does not motivate them or help in prospects of employment. Besides, once a child gets a job, he does not want to be dependent on his family. Schooling for him implies dependence on the family for about 5 to 7 years. Working children often regard their employment as a means to help and support of their younger siblings.

Social Factor—

A survey conducted by Shri Poromesh Acharya, Professor of Management in Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta in connection with a research project captioned "Problems of education in the weaker sections of the rural community" goes to show that there is a close co-relation between educational achievement (in terms of literacy and enrolment) and agrarian class structure. There is also a co-relation between educational achievement and caste status and income level. It goes to show that literacy and enrolment rates decline very steeply in accordance with the hierarchical order of the agrarian society. At the primary level, 84.11% of the total number of enrolled students belonged to the 3 upper-strata of the agrarian society, namely—jotedars, rich peasants and middle peasants. At the secondary level, 98.76% of the total number of enrolled students belonged to the 3 upper strata. It is pertinent to note that 100% of the children in the age-group 6-11 years belonging to jotedar families were found to be enrolled in contrast to 5.66% of the children of the same age-group belonging to agricultural labourers. It was observed that 25.17% of the total number of non-enrolled children in the age group of 6 to 10 years are gainfully employed as child labour while 98.67% of the working children belong to the three agrarian classes—agricultural labourers, poor peasants and lower middle peasants.

The survey goes to show that the upper strata of the rural society in West Bengal has reaped almost all the benefits of the gigantic expansion of the educational

facilities. Not only their children are the sole beneficiaries but even as teachers they have appropriated a major chunk of the huge expenditure incurred by the State for expansion of the educational facilities. The vast expansion of the educational facilities has in fact helped to heighten the differentiation in rural society rather than reduce it. The resultant incongenial social condition has made the process of universal education even more complicated.

(VI)

Two scenarios emerge from the above analysis. One is dealing with the problem of enrolment of the non-enrolled, laying down minimum levels of learning, ensuring participation in the entire teaching learning process for a sufficiently long duration which will ensure retention of both the cognitive and non-cognitive skills acquired through schooling. The second is dealing with the problems of access of working children to the formal school system and laying down strategies for educating working children as also formulating long term development measures for working children. In both again, special measures will have to be prescribed for girls, members of SC and ST whose needs are somewhat different from those of boys.

In regard to the first, we need to concentrate on the 3 main components of UEE. These are :

Universal Access —

This presupposes that a primary school or NFE centre is available to all children within a walkable distance and that they are able to join it. The All India Educational Survey indicates accessibility of 94% of rural children in 6-11 age group to primary schools within a walking distance of 1 Km and 85.3% of rural children in the same age group to upper primary schools within a distance of 3 Kms. It should be possible to provide schooling (either formal or non-formal) to the remaining 6% and 14.61% of the rural

population in the next 5 to 10 years.

Universal Participation —

Access by itself may not ensure participation which would mean enrolment of all children, upto approximately 14 years of age in a primary/upper primary school or NFE centres and their retention till they complete at least 5 years of schooling or its equivalent through nonformal courses or compressed courses in respect of children who are nearing 14 years of age. Universal participation presupposes organisation of target specific measures to ensure that children who are left out receive due attention — girls, SC/ST children, working children etc.

Universal Achievement —

It is essential to emphasize that along with universal enrolment and retention, children of school going age attain the predetermined minimum levels of learning and are provided opportunity for effective development.

All these have been simply stated but their implications need to be understood with much greater depth and intensity. It is also necessary to have an indepth understanding of the factors which do not make universal access or participation possible and lay down specific measures in that direction. Illustratively, and as has been said earlier, parental attitude is a major factor which may make or mar the prospects of universal access and retention. Equally unfortunate is the attitude of most of the conservative and illiterate parents who look upon education of girls as a greater liability. They perceive the role of the girl child in the family primarily for discharge of household chores and looking after the younger siblings.

We have to counter these attitudes and make a beginning to inject the right attitude and right approach through a variety of ways.

One of the ways is to enact role plays, simulation exercises, skits and folk plays before the parents and particularly the illiterate and the conservative to inject a

positive attitude in their mind that girls are as important an asset as boys, they are endowed with as much intelligence, ingenuity and resourcefulness and ability to work as those of boys and that a functionally literate child is an asset and not a liability to the family. The mass campaigns for total literacy where environment building and demand generation constitute key activities could be an important tool or instrumentality for sensitising the parents and generating a heightened awareness in them to view education in its correct perspective.

Simultaneously a host of measures will be needed to bring about a qualitative change in the overall environment of schooling and to create conditions which will make universal enrolment and retention possible. This would mean provision of a minimum 2 room school building with library, toilet, games and sports facilities, dealing with the problem of teacher's training, ensuring that the teachers open the school in time and do not remain away from the village where the school is located, that they accord a humane and sensitive treatment to children belonging to SC, ST, minorities and backward classes and also girls in co-educational schools, that the school management is accountable to the village community and inspires confidence in the community by its overall dispensation etc.

In identifying the special needs of the children of the disadvantaged groups belonging to the SC, ST, minorities and backward classes, the close correlation between educational achievement, agrarian class structure, caste status and income level will have to be kept in view. An integrated plan needs to be formulated which would keep in view both the educational and habitat needs and other basic needs such as health, hygiene, sanitation, nutrition etc. and which would impart a holistic character to the entire programme.

The tribal areas have their own habitat,

cultural and cognitive specificities and we cannot ignore them while drawing up a plan of educational development of tribal children. Designing the school building in tune with the architecture of tribal homes, identifying candidates from amongst the ST and upgrading their skills through condensed courses instead of inducting teachers from plain areas, flexible school timings in conformity with the season for collection of minor forest produce and introducing bilingual primers for tribal children could be some of the illustrative components of this strategy which will bridge the gap between the home environment and the school environment and generating a positive attitude and interest in the minds of tribal parents that the school is a community institution attuned to their needs and it is worth sending their children there.

In dealing with the problem of girls' enrolment and retention a host of measures will have to be thought of such as improving accessibility of girls to schooling by opening up more schools exclusively for girls, increasing the number of NFE centres for girls, increasing the number of women teachers, instructors and supervisors, providing residential accommodation to women teachers in rural areas and appointing husband-wife teams in interior and inaccessible pockets.

There is a basic dichotomy in our thinking and action in dealing with the problems of working children as also in providing a suitable package of non-formal education for them which will be relevant to their cognitive and non-cognitive needs. The first dichotomy stems from the fact we have accepted child labour as a harsh reality and have enacted legislations to improve the working conditions of children but so far only lip service has been paid to eradication of child labour. This aspect has been rather exhaustively dealt earlier and it is worth repeating that no talk of regulation of the working and living conditions of child labour will make any

sense until and unless we have been able to put an end of the pernicious contract labour system.

The dichotomy in NFE also arises from the fact that most of the programmes for providing free and compulsory elementary education are addressed to dependent children and not working children. Most of the State Governments have treated NFE rather casually and have demonstrated their lack of faith and confidence in its efficacy. There is equal lack of trust amongst functionaries and families of children who are expected to benefit from it. This lack of confidence is shared by a large cross section of the society which views it as a second rate programme for the poorer sections of the society.

A number of corrective steps need to be introduced to restore the trust and confidence of government functionaries and above all the community in the efficacy of the programme as also to bring about a qualitative change and improvement in the content and process of the programme. To start with, the curriculum and content of the NFE programme needs to be designed in such a manner that it is in conformity with preferences, felt needs and interests of working children; it need not be an extension of the formal system of education. It should be as simple and nonthreatening as possible. Secondly, the curriculum and content of the ongoing formal school system often promotes a culture of acquiescence and submissiveness. What we are looking forward to is a culture which will break children away from submissiveness and acquiescence and promote the ability to think, ponder and wonder, reflect, analyse, question and internalise all issues as objectively as it should be. This would require a curriculum and content altogether different from what we have today and this change is relevant as much for NFE as it is for the formal system. Thirdly, working children who missed the opportunity to

enter school or dropped out after being in the school for a year or two need condensed and quick study courses for their sensitive minds. This which is otherwise known as the 'Madhya Pradesh Model' provides competence in language and mathematics of the same level as in primary education. The programme is run for 1½ to 2 hours in the evening for about 2 years. The responsibility of running the NFE Centre rests on a locally selected Instructor who is given a short duration training. The preparation and use of condensed courses for all relevant subjects is imperative to popularise education among working children. Today this is the most widespread NFE programme in the country. Fourthly, our schools generally function on a single point entry system and a sequential curriculum which expects a child to rise from one standard to a higher standard at yearly intervals. Grown up children who missed the point of entry for one reason or another find it almost impossible to enter school. The provision of multiple entry points in schools can increase the enrolment of working children and prevent the incidence of heavy wastage.

Fifthly, it has been observed that parents/guardians of working children and children themselves look for the type of education which would improve the earning prospects of children. Formal as well as vocational education could be combined to prepare working children for a vocation, to upgrade their skills and to provide them literacy and general education.

Sixthly, working children who work for long hours would be tired out and would hardly have any time or energy for study. Studies have shown that the average duration of work for a working child in Greater Bombay is about 11 hours a day. They can be motivated to join NFE only if there is some relief from long hours of work. This would be possible not merely by statutory regulation of the hours of work but by an empathetic and sensitive

handling of the issue by employers. As a matter of fact, the employers, parents and working children themselves must develop a positive consensus to continue education with employment and to provide wherewithal for such combination.

Eventually unless children are liberated from the vicelike grip of their employers i.e. contractors, subcontractors and sub-subcontractors no meaningful educational programme can be organised for them and no programme of education can be meaningful unless it is relevant to the life of children. Writing on the formidable problem of motivating and sensitising the parents to send their children to school, Mr. Hodgson Prat, Inspector of Schools, South Bengal had observed in 1857. "The poorest classes, those who form the mass do not want schools at all because they do not understand the use of education, because they are too poor to pay schooling fees and subscriptions, and because the labour of their children is required to enable them to live. The middle and upper classes will make no sort of sacrifice for the establishment of any but English schools."

After nearly 44 years of lopsided educational development since independence the only course which appears feasible to answer "Why Kedari Cried?" is to arouse and awaken the working class including working children to demand, organised and institutionalised education as they consider relevant and appropriate for themselves. That will also be an answer to bundles of fads, taboos and mistaken notions about the need of education and rationale of sending children to school. The demand has not only to be generated, it has to be internalised and a mass movement will have to be launched for its institutionalisation. This may not happen today or tomorrow; it will be a long drawn out process. It will call for lot of patience, adjustment and sacrifice which every process of change as a traumatic one entails.

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COMMITMENT TO LITERACY

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What is Commitment?

According to Oxford Dictionary 'commitment' means 'understanding' or 'pledge', 'dedication to or involvement with a particular action, cause etc.'

It is a very important concept as far as literacy is concerned. Therefore it is also essential that all literacy lovers try to understand what actually is meant by this word and its significance.

Committing oneself to a cause means involving oneself fully for that cause or dedicating oneself heart and soul for the promotion and achievement of that goal. For example, a poet is committed to his poetry; a musician to his music; a painter to his painting; a sportsman to his sport and so on. They all virtually love their particular field of activity deeply and express themselves fully and freely in the particular area chosen by them, work for the promotion of same and find fulfilment in that.

Therefore, committing oneself to a cause results in a series of actions, say a chain reaction. It is not only cherishing an idea but living with it, enabling its growth and development to the fullest extent possible. In other words, **commitment means coming together of ideas and action. No idea can find expression without action. True action is possible only by commitment to that idea or ideal.**

Pseudo Commitment

Some people pose as if they are committed. But actually speaking you will find them not acting to fulfil the same. This sort of pseudo commitment is more harmful than no commitment at

all. This happens more in political and official circles, where the loyalty is to a person in seat of power who may advocate a cause and the followers also seem to show commitment. But actually their commitment is not to the cause or ideal but to the person which may also be not lasting.

Inner Conviction

Commitment born out of inner conviction is what is wanted and not an imposed sort of compulsion. This is where the NGOs seem to score a point over bureaucrats. NGOs are largely imbued by commitment to undertake a scheme or project as compared to Government officials who have to do the job irrespective of the fact whether they are committed and convinced about it or not. But fortunately we can find hundreds of committed Government officers working for promotion of literacy today in different districts of India. This is something unique and has helped to widen the effort considerably. Their commitment and work has opened-up new vistas in administration and development work. The NGOs have also been enthused and encouraged by such endeavours. A job done with emotional fervour and attachment to the cause is always better done than as a routine affair. The factor of 'commitment' has therefore to be understood intimately if one has to appreciate its relevance to literacy endeavour.

Commitment brings forth the positive human faculties into play and provides it with opportunities for flourishing, a psychological environment for progress blessing both the actor

and the action.

Commitment to Literacy

In the field of literacy promotion it has been found that 'commitment' on the part of literacy workers goes a long way in achieving the desired results despite heavy odds. It enables the worker to be self-confident and approach his/her clientele group without any sort of fear, favour or hesitation. The simple truth of committed people's success while working together has to be understood in this back-ground and how it provides inspiration to them to go on and on till the goal is reached.

It is commitment and commitment alone that enables people from different walks of life to come together and work together for a common cause and enriches them with missionary spirit to move towards the goal steadfastly. This has happened and history is replete with such stories and revolutions like that of our own Independence struggle.

The secret of success in such ventures has been and would continue to be 'commitment' but for which things would have remained impossible. Those committed to a cause sacrifice their time, energy, money and everything else for the cause dear to them. They don't think of profiting or gaining by it except gaining 'self-fulfilment' in the process.

Committed people don't look back or feel slack — they are above ordinary men and women with zeal and zest for achieving set goals. Commitment is more an internal equation, an internal realisation and preparation to face challenge ahead in the way of achieving the objective.

A Powerful Motivating Force

Therefore one should not view commitment as a 'show' or minimize its role and importance in literacy endeavour. **It is indeed a potent and powerful motivating force in the hands of leadership to initiate action, to involve people, to mobilise public opinion and to translate 'ideas' into 'actions'.**

As one starts working intensely with an idea or thought, commitment comes automatically. Training of mind and body can add to one's commitment to a cause. Discussing things would help in promoting one's commitment. However, it is self-appraisal of the person and his constant labour that deepens his commitment to the cause.

If literacy promotion has met with a measure of success in some parts of India, it only goes to show that there are committed workers who have made it possible through their hard work and effort. If the effort has failed or not made a good impact in other places, again it only proves there is need for committed workers in all such places. **Because commitment leads to peoples' participation and their total involvement without which literacy promotion is difficult.**

COMMUNICATION MEDIA AND LITERACY

Avik Ghosh

Since the launch of the National Literacy Mission in May, 1988 it has been recognised that media and communication has an important role in the achievement of the Mission goals. In a societal Mission like NLM it is necessary to mobilize resources through the voluntary participation of individuals, groups and associations/organizations in the activities of the Mission.

Broadly speaking, communication media contribute in motivating volunteers and functionaries as well as encouraging learners to participate in the programme. Whether it is the folk media and cultural jathas, as used during the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Jatha (BGVJ) or in the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) districts, or the carefully designed radio and TV spots with the message **Chalo Padhayen Kuch Kar Dikhayen** or the literacy song **Padhna Likhna Seekho** based on a song by Bertolt Brecht, the objective is the same : make an emotional appeal to the viewer to identify with the cause of eradication of literacy or, in the case of the learners, realize the necessity of becoming literate and so, desire to become literate.

The appeal of different media are necessarily different. There is no doubt that face to face communication is more direct and therefore, the more participatory mode of cultural performances, that are rooted in the specificities of the local milieu, have greater attraction and impact. Supported by the interaction through volunteers/activists, this mode of communication has instant widespread appeal. The success of the Kerala programme is clear evidence of that.

However, such cultural performances or jathas require careful planning and rehearsal to ensure that the performance level is of appropriate quality and the message is driven home. Subsequent to the jatha, it is necessary that the enthusiasm generated among the audience is channelised into meaningful activity without any delay. Failure in this regard would render the cultural jatha meaningless and wasteful.

In a similar vein, the use of the powerful and sophisticated electronic media (radio/TV) has to be coordinated with adequate follow-up. **Regular exposure of a message on radio and television ensures that the message reaches a very large number of persons.** The end appeal in the radio/TV spots draws the attention of the viewer/listener to the NLM PO Box No. 9999 requiring the person to write for more information. If the responses received during the month of July 1991 is any indication, success is warranted as the number of inquiries received in Delhi alone has been over 10,000 in number. While the number of letters received in the different states may be less it would still be significant and large. Here again, it is necessary to respond to the person inquiring, with further information and giving the person an opportunity to show the travails of two instructors (one female and one male) as they set up and then run two adult education centres in a village setting. Using music and other cinematic devices and introducing two 'magical' characters (Nat and Nati) who appear and disappear at will, **Dhai Akhar** delivers all the

messages and instructions in an appealing way for the instructors. A similar Pattern of nine audio programmes were used in the Project in Radio Education for Adult Literacy (PREAL) for training the 4000 instructors within a short span of ten days.

Here again, while interesting programmes or training materials may be produced with a little research, imagination and care, using such programmes in the field situation requires planning and initiative of the programme managers who should be writing to break new ground and able to overcome the difficulties that arise with the introduction of new technological tools.

Finally, the area where the use of electronic media could become a major cost-effective measure is in the teaching-learning process itself. At present, the instructor/volunteer relies on a primer and little else. Some teaching aids are occasionally used. Use of radio or television (or audio/video cassettes in the non-broadcast mode) could significantly enhance the learning experience and perhaps shorten the duration of learning. Designing the software, managing the technology on the ground, ensuring access and regularity of usage are problems, no doubt, but none that could not be overcome without proper planning and management. Recently, the Directorate of Adult Education, Government of India in collaboration with All India Radio has tried to participate in the programme through proper guidance. Otherwise, the voluntary spirit that is kindled will die out and the Mission would have lost a potential volunteer.

In short, the communication media can effectively create awareness, making the cause of literacy 'top of mind' among viewers, and even succeed in invoking a desire to be a part of the movement and volunteer to do something for it. However, to convert the desire and willingness of the volunteer into active participation requires careful

planning and preparedness on the part of the programme managers and other functionaries of NLM.

It is equally true that communication activity, whether through the mass media or through the use of more local folk or traditional media, enthruses those who are already engaged in the NLM programme as volunteers/instructors or other functionaries and programme managers. It acts as a 'morale booster' and encourages them to strive for higher/better results. At the same time, more specific training and orientation materials could be prepared using the electronic media. In a massive programme like NLM, there is never enough time for training of the instructor/volunteer who have to actually impart literacy. Apart from the fact that adequate time is not available good trainers are also not available in adequate numbers. It is here that well designed training materials or 'packages' like **Dhai Akhar** become useful. Entertaining and educative, this set of films use radio lessons to improve reading abilities among learners in selected districts of Bihar, UP, Rajasthan and MP. The one year project PREAL has yielded encouraging results and has shown the direction in which further work can be done.

Currently, a TV serial of 40 episodes titled **Chauraha** is due for telecast from Doordarshan. This programme teaches the Hindi alphabet through use of computer animation techniques. Use of puppets and a narrative structure, full of emotion and drama, makes the programme appealing to the intended audience of poor and illiterate women. Some impressions gathered through screening in the poorer settlements of Delhi indicate that learners do get motivated to learn and succeed in learning to write the letters as depicted in the film. The next step would be to try out **Chauraha** in a larger area and evaluate its success.

In conclusion, it is important to remember that preparation of good quality material for radio/television is only a small but important part of the total operation. Utilization of electronic media requires planning and coordination of many elements like supply of hardware and consumables, training and ensuring access and regularity of usage, monitoring and trouble shooting. All this means a qualitatively different management approach with sufficient flexibility. The existing structures would have to change if new technologies that hold promise are to be inducted into the adult education programme.



THE BASIC OBSTACLE IN ERADICATING MASS ILLITERACY

Tarlok Singh

The stark truth is that, as a nation, **India has yet to commit herself fully to the eradication of mass illiteracy** within a measurable period. **This is the basic obstacle** before all those who believe that, without substantially eliminating illiteracy, India cannot become a cohesive nation and give to all her citizens the quality of life they have long yearned for. This condition prevails 41 years after the Constitution was promulgated, 25 years after the Education Commission declared that national indifference to eradication of illiteracy would not go unpunished, five years after the adoption of the National Policy on Education, and three years after the setting up of the National Literacy Mission. Inaugural addresses delivered at the highest level on prestigious occasions concerning education and literacy have said much by way of exhortation to others to do their part but have carefully avoided any firm commitment on the part of the Government to provide the resources and mobilise the nation's abundant energies to complete the task of eradicating mass illiteracy more or less by a given date. The limited goals of imparting functional literacy to 30 million persons in the age group 15-35 by 1990 and to 80 million by 1995 have already become echoes from the past.

Thanks to efforts initiated in 1978 and pursued since, **the infrastructures for supporting a National movement for ending illiteracy have been considerably strengthened.** The State Resource Centres are a useful development and eventually they are to be

supplemented by District Resource Units. Some assistance is being given to voluntary organisations, but much of it is severely constrained and hemmed in by all manner of unimaginative and futile bureaucratic restrictions from the Centre. What is happening in this area is the very opposite of measures and policies needed to support a nation-wide voluntary movement from the grassroots. There have been numerous meetings of State Governments and State officials, but their content has been essentially formal and procedural, without a real dialogue on how best to succeed quickly throughout the country. There is nothing yet like a detailed programme of action district by district, State by State, with weak areas and difficult problems carefully identified and provided for, resources firmly assured, and go-head signals clearly given and accepted.

During the past three years much time has been spent on pedagogy and technology, but local and regional innovations and freedom of choice have been effectively discouraged. The recent emphasis on mass campaigns to create greater awareness and demand for literacy on the part of men and women who have remained illiterate has some interest and even a semblance of merit, but can be no substitute for effective and sustained action on the ground, village by village and area by area. Instead of welcoming all the available options, including the so-called 'centre' approach, 'each one teach one' or 'each one teach many' the concerned central agency puts

increasing obstacles in the way of voluntary and local agencies bringing learners together into 'centres' and imparting to them both literacy and other skills and socially useful knowledge. To this day the country does not have a coherent and well-worked out plan of action which will unite the Centre and the States, local bodies and voluntary organisations and constructive workers in a cumulative, all-embracing national effort.

As if the failures of the past years were not warning enough, the recent **Committee for Review of National Policy on Education 1986** (of which Acharya Ramamurti was Chairman), doubtless without wishing to, has put the clock further back. In its Perspective Paper on Education (September 1990), repeating the false signals of the early fifties, the Committee has observed :

'In the case of adults, inability to read and write has not necessarily meant lack of education' and attempts at emphasising adult literacy as such, as constituting education would be misplaced, the clear perception being that an illiterate adult is not necessarily an uneducated person. The intention is not to romanticize illiteracy but rather to underscore the need to redesign adult education programme meaningfully. What is of far greater importance, however, is to ensure that all children receive school education in this decade so that they do not become illiterate adults in the next century.

In its full report entitled **Towards an Enlightened and Humane Society** (December 1990), the Committee has not offered any meaningful scheme of work, merely recommending that after the Eighth Plan an independent study group should evaluate the programme now under way and propose 'appropriate strategies to remove adult illiteracy in the quickest possible time'. And further—

'The evaluation may also look into the various alternative models and study their relevance with respect to diverse socio-cultural and political conditions in different parts of India. The minimum objective of this study should be to find out on objective basis what approaches do not yield results, so that, five years later, at least those models may not be encouraged.'

In the area of eradication of illiteracy, the Ramamurti Committee's Report leaves one with a feeling of utter dismay.

The Eighth Plan is still to come. The course over the past two or three years given to its formulation has been far from steady. The third group of planners at the national level within a short period of two years face severe economic burdens. If, like those who have preceded them, they also choose to hit soft targets like essential social services, development of human resources, assuring minimum needs, and eradicating mass illiteracy, in any real referendum, the Plan which emerges will surely fail to qualify for national acceptance.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS AND PLANS FOR 1991-92

Malcolm S. Adiseshiah

This International Literacy Day 1991 is once more upon us. We should start with estimating what we have done about illiteracy in the one year that has lapsed since the International Literacy year that we celebrated ending in December 1990.

The World Position

In the year we estimated that there were one billion people — a fifth of humanity in our world — who could not read or write. Almost 100 million children had no chance of schooling. We also estimated that the functional illiterates in the advanced countries is more than 50 million.

India Problem

As far as our country is concerned, the 1991 census reports that our literacy rate as of March 1991 was 52.11 per cent of the 844 million people in the country, with females being 33 1/3 per cent less literate than men. In addition some 50 million children of school age were not in school.

ACHIEVEMENTS

World

During 1990-91 UNESCO estimates that the world literacy declined by 4 percentage points, while the number of illiterates increased by 72 million. The number of children of primary school age who are out of school also declined by 12 million.

India

For India 1991 census shows a decrease of little over 10 percentage points of illiterates between 1981-91, while the absolute number increased during this 10

year period by over 22 million. The number of children of primary school age who were not in school also declined by 12 million between 1981-1991.

PROGRAMMES TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN 1991-92

The task facing us both in the world and in India is for us to bring about a literate world by 2,000 A.D., or soon thereafter. This means that both in the world and in India we should have no illiterates and no children out of school by the turn of the century. This requires that all educated persons in each country of the world and in India must engage himself or herself in making 8 or 10 illiterates (about 60 percent being females) literate every year.

For India this involves :

- the 5,000 - odd voluntary agencies, undertaking an intensive literacy teaching programme particularly of women and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes together with inducing parents to send their children to primary schools.
- The universities, Colleges and Higher Secondary Schools should arrange for their 6 million students to spend their summer vacation in the villages and urban slums, making illiterates literate and aware of their position, so that they can improve their lot themselves and continue their literacy learning in the future. For this Adult Education should become part of the University/College/Higher Secondary School curriculum.

—The National Literacy Movement launched by the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi working in the districts, blocks, villages of the country should complete during this year the programme of making the people literate, so that in the next and future years, they would continue their literacy learning themselves through libraries and cultural centres established in each village. They should also ensure that there will be no children of primary school age being out of school.

The Challenge

This year the Ministry of Human Resource Development, and particularly the National Literacy Mission will be supporting and financing these essential 3 pronged effort, because education is part of every one's right and because without literacy there can be no development.

This is the challenge facing us, in this year 1991-92, on this International Literacy Day September 8, 1991.



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