

# EDUCATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

JACOB AIKARA

Education is expected to play an important role in the economic and political development of rural areas. Formal education, as it is today, is highly urban oriented, so that it does not adequately perform its economic and political functions in rural areas. The situation may be tackled by the introduction of non-formal education. Our national policy on education should be flexible enough to take care of the special educational needs of rural areas. Social workers can play an important role in the massive programme of rural education for development.

Dr. Jacob Aikara is Lecturer in the Unit for Research in the Sociology of Education, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Deonar. Bombay 400 088.

Today education is seen to be an important agent of development both in urban and in rural areas. The Education Commission (1964-66) considers education as the main instrument of change. If change on a grand scale is to be achieved, it says, "without violent revolution (and even for that it would be necessary) there is one instrument, and one instrument only, that can be used: EDUCATION. Other agencies may help, and can indeed sometimes have a more apparent impact. But the national system of education is the only instrument that can reach all the people. It is not, however, a magic wand to wave wishes into existence. It is a difficult instrument, whose effective use requires strength of will dedicated work and sacrifice. But it is a sure and tried instrument, which has served other countries well in their struggle for development. It can, given the will and the skill, do so for India" (Ministry of Education, 1971:8). In stressing the importance of education for development, however, it must be added that the kind and manner of education depending upon the situation are also important, if education were to produce the desired results. "Those who argue the importance of heavy investment of resources in education by a developing country — changing from a rural to an urban society — do so by analogy from modern societies. Yet, this needs to be done with caution.

One commentator points out that whereas sheer achievement of literacy is clearly a prerequisite to the evolution of any modern society, a nation of Ph.D.'s is not a necessary precondition. The question is not whether education is essential to development but rather what kinds, at what levels, in what quantities, how organized, and how administered" (Sanders, 1977:107). The important issue in education for development is not so much the need of education for development, as the kind of education required for development. Till recently education has been a privilege of the urbanities. Curricula and syllabi were prepared by the urbanites who designed educational programmes as though life should adjust to class room, instead of the reverse. During the British regime, education was for the urbanites and also by the urbanites. After independence India has been consciously trying to expand education beyond the limits of the city. Thus rural education has become a concept and a target. Today rural education is expected to play an important role in rural development. The role of education in the economic and political development — the two important aspects of development -- of rural India has to be viewed in the context of the predominantly agricultural economy of rural India and democratic politics of the country. The fact that our formal education is urban based and urban oriented calls for the

need for orienting education to be functional to the ruralites and introducing educational programmes that are relevant and suited to the needs and interests of the ruralites. In this national effort to provide suitable education to the rural population social workers can play an important role.

*Education and Economic and Political Development.*

Traditionally the relationship between education and economy was conceived of in terms of manpower production. In other words, with regard to economic development education was considered to be an agent of training for occupations that required certain special knowledge and skills. In this respect the educational function of manpower production was something that was concerned with the urban society. It was applicable to rural society in so far as ruralites were prepared for urban occupations. This would result in the migration of ruralites to cities. The implication of this approach to the economic function of education is that training for agricultural occupation in rural areas is simple and can be acquired through the process of socialization at home outside the system of formal education. That is, the child interacting with the elders and participating in agricultural pursuits acquires the minimum knowledge and experience of agricultural occupation by the time it attains adulthood. Thus formal education has had little economic function in rural areas, or at least it has not been designed to serve the agricultural economy of rural areas. At a time when rural education was confined to a few privileged individuals who migrated to cities both for education and for occupational placement, this rural-economy-neglected education was never questioned. With the expansion to rural areas education has be-

come available to a large number of ruralites. Consequently, the number of ruralites who seek education is much larger than what the urban society needs and can absorb. Naturally, the economic function of education can no more be thought of merely in terms of manpower production for urban occupations. Today the need to orient rural education to be in the service of rural economy also, is recognized.

Formal education, because of its traditional preoccupation with manpower production for urban occupations (mostly white collar jobs), has had an urban bias. Education may have to be divorced of this urban bias and modified in order to be of use in the rural situation. India being a predominantly rural country and rural economy being agricultural, economic development of rural India will have to be thought of in terms of agricultural development. Even the few non-agricultural occupations that have been emerging in<sup>9</sup> the rural areas have to be rural based rather than urban oriented. Therefore, if we were to think of manpower production for the non-agricultural occupations of rural India agricultural bias cannot be escaped. One of the reasons for the shortage of manpower for non-agricultural occupations in rural areas (doctors, engineers, teachers, and those belonging to the executive cadre) is that our education for manpower production has been urban oriented. The result has been that qualified professionals are reluctant to serve the rural community. Our urban oriented education has instilled in the ruralites a disdain for rural occupations. "Whoever gets educated today, irrespective of his social and cultural traditions and the economic circumstances of his family and community, acquires invariably the upper class prejudices and postures as well, the most outstanding of which... is a strict aversion to and disdain for manual work. He leaves agriculture altogether, because

cultivation, or in fact any kind of manual work in the rural context, is considered totally incompatible with education. The result is that the spread of literacy among the peasant classes helps to improve neither the techniques of cultivation nor agricultural production --- the two most pressing problems today in the agrarian field. Instead of being utilized to improve agriculture, education is looked upon as an avenue of escape from it" (Nair, 1961:149). True, our urban areas do require some of the ruralites as qualified and skilled manpower for the various urban occupations. But they are *to* be considered as exceptional since their number is insignificant compared to the vast majority who have to live in and serve, the rural community. Education should not be designed for the exceptional only. What the rural areas require is education designed for the ruralites, whether it be for improving the rural economy, or for producing professional manpower for rural areas. There are educationists who do not favour any rural biased education for the rural people. They argue that the rural parents in general who send their children to school want them to have an education that will enable them to go in for urban based white collar jobs. Any effort to "ruralize" education, in their view, will meet with failure (Griffiths. 1968:16 20). It is a fact that most of the rural children who pursue education do not wish to go back to the farm from the school. However, it must be noted that at present only a small minority of ruralites go for formal education and seek urban jobs thereafter. The vast majority of the rural population is to live and work within the rural areas. If education were rural biased, probably many more ruralites would have made use of it. The exceptional rural individuals who are potential migrants to cities, of course, would like to have an urban biased education. But rural education cannot afford

the luxury of being designed only to cater to the 'urban' needs of the insignificant minority.

If rural education were to be functional to rural economy, it should equip the ruralites with the knowledge necessary to successfully pursue their agricultural pursuits. Education can perform this function in various respects. It can bring home to the rural man the gains of technology in so far as they are useful for him. It can enrich the rural man with the knowledge of the rural environment he is working in. It can train the rural man to pursue his occupation scientifically, i.e. training to fertilize his field and rotate his crops, to utilize, operate and repair tools and machines, and to have organized agricultural operations. It can give him knowledge about how his products are sold, how they are utilized and what facilities are offered by the government and other agencies in order to help the rural man. Education geared to operate in this way would be more useful to the rural man, more functional to rural economy and more relevant to our predominantly rural country.

Political development in rural India may be considered as the progress towards political consciousness among the ruralites and their political participation. Unlike knowledge of, and training for, rural occupations, knowledge of the new democratic political system and internalization of the new political roles are not easily acquired by ruralites through socialization. Ruralites in India have been used to caste and community identities and to simple acceptance rather than decision making in matters of politics. In the democratic political system, they are to act under broad national identities instead of narrow identities; instead of the caste/community loyalty, they are to have allegiance to political parties based on ideologies. Instead of acceptance and approval of leaders and rulers, they are to choose

their leaders and rulers.

If, even after three decades of democratic politics, we find that democratic values have not been internalized by the ruralites, it is an indication of poor political socialization. We cannot expect socialization to successfully inculcate all the new elements of political system in the ruralites. Education will have to play an important role in the political socialization of ruralites for adequate political participation. The urbanites may be in a position to internalize through socialization much of the basic knowledge required for political participation. As a consequence of it, formal education in India today, as it is urban based, presupposes among the ruralites certain basic knowledge regarding the political system. This is too presumptuous. In villages which are not thrust open by political activities and propaganda, education will have to do a great deal in socializing the ruralites to be responsible and active citizens. The content of education should be such that the rural children will get the minimum knowledge about the nation and its history, about Indian democracy and its operation. New ideologies, new knowledge and new patterns of political behaviour have to be inculcated in a form understandable to the ruralites through channels other than socializaion.

### *Non-Formal Education*

In view of the fact that education in rural areas has certain important economic and political functions, it may be asked what form of education will be able to perform these functions. Formal education, as it is today, suffers from certain drawbacks in this respect. First, a large number of rural children who enter the formal system of education drop out without completing even primary education. Second, formal education has no provision to take

care of the educational needs of the drop-out children and illiterate and uneducated adults. Third, formal education remains urban oriented. Thus, rural areas face the situation wherein socialization is insufficient, and formal education is inefficient, to meet their educational needs. A solution that could be offered to tackle the situation is non-formal education. It is believed that non-formal education will be able to take care of many of the drawbacks of formal education in rural areas. The advantage of non-formal education is its flexibility vis-a-vis the rigidity of formal education with respect to the learner, teacher, content and manner of teaching/learning. It has its own eligibility requirements for learners, qualification/experience requirements for teachers, content and method of education according to the needs of particular learners and situations. In other words non-formal education is flexible enough to suit the learners and their situations.

The main tasks of non-formal education in rural areas are concerned with the learners to be covered and the content to be taught. As far as the learners are concerned non-formal education is to cater to those who are not covered by formal education, viz. the out-of-school ruralites. There are two categories of them: adults and children. The vast majority of the rural adults in India are illiterate and uneducated. One of the reasons why children themselves are reluctant to go to school or drop out from schools in rural areas is that rural adults in general are uneducated. Educational problem of the adults cannot be dealt with in the regular schools. Adults will not be prepared to sit along with children in schools. Nor will they be interested in the lessons that are designed for children. Adult education has to be different from regular school education both in form and in content. The non-school-going children have either' dropped out from

school or never entered school, because they themselves were not interested in, or available for, studies. Formal education is not likely to help them, because the dropouts may not be psychologically disposed to re-enter schools and because the never entrants may not be available (probably for socio-economic reasons) for schooling. With the content and form of education suited to their situations, i.e. through non-formal education, it may be possible to give these children some education that is useful to them.

Regarding the content, non-formal education aims at making it relevant to the learners and their socio-economic and political environment. Formal education is structured around literacy and numeracy, i.e. the learning of the three 'R's. One of the reasons why formal education does not attract the ruralites in large numbers is its academic content. The average rural man would like to have an education that is geared to rural vocation. Rural people are practical and are not inclined to devote themselves to arm chair speculation and purely academic pursuits. They are constantly in touch with nature and physical environment. They look forward to make use of their knowledge in their day to day life and work. Rural education, therefore, should be useful and helpful to the rural man in his occupation. Sometimes ruralites are scared of education because they imagine that education will make their children unfit for rural practical life "People in rural areas everywhere who have not had the opportunity to go to school themselves have been traditionally suspicious of "book learning". The farm children helped their parents, for generation-upon-generation. They learned supposedly all they needed to know from working in natural surroundings, and in so doing probably learned more about life than city children who were "wasting time" with paper and pencils.

Those who may have wanted formal education for their children were (and are) unable to allow them enough free time to go to school — there is too much work for them to do. If they could be spared for a while, it was thought that going to school would probably only give them ideas to make them dissatisfied with farm life" (Unesco, 1970: 2), Unless rural education is vocation-oriented, i.e. made useful in terms of the occupational life of the rural man, the ruralites are not likely to get attracted to education. Family-operated farms in rural areas involve high labour input, even unskilled which makes it possible for boys and girls to be productively employed at a relatively young age. Thus rural children are likely to prefer productive employment to education that is not job oriented. Purely academic education is likely to render the ruralites unemployed. In some cases the ruralites who receive education migrate to urban areas and either succeed in getting some job or swell the number of the unemployed. In non-formal education it is possible to have the vocational bias in the place of academic bias.

The emphasis in non-formal education is on what is called functional literacy, i.e. knowledge necessary for an individual to function successfully in his socio-economic and political environment. It may or may not include literacy and numeracy. For instance, in the case of non-school-going children non-formal education may have programmes of literacy and numeracy together with other contents. In the case of rural adults, however, non-formal education geared to 'technical literacy' and political socialization may be more relevant. With the introduction of modern farming today the rural man, for instance, should know about the optimum dose of fertilizers and pesticides, about maintenance and repair of farm equipment, etc. Regarding political socialization, he should have the minimum

knowledge to participate in the democracy of our nation. In other words, rural education must enable a ruralite to function more efficiently in his rural occupation and in his role as a citizen.

In view of the fact that majority of the rural adults are illiterate and most of the rural children of school going age are out of school, non-formal education is expected to play an important role in rural education for many more years to come. However, one should not have the impression that non-formal education is a substitute to altogether replace formal education in rural areas. Formal education should always be there for those who are available for it. It is through formal education that the potential migrants to urban areas can catch up with the urbanites. Formal education also develops the intellectual and psychological potentialities of the individual. It should be, therefore, encouraged for those who are available for it. However, efforts must be made to make formal education more relevant and useful to rural man. Any drastic change in the urban based academic aspect of rural formal education is likely to have strong resentment from the part of the privileged few ruralites who have had the benefit of urban oriented education; the potential migrants to urban areas too may be adversely affected by such a step. At the same time if formal education in rural areas functions in the urban way, it falls short of being functional to the average rural man. Possibly some programme of non-formal education, that would serve as supplementary to formal education, could be introduced in rural schools in order to make it more functional in the socio-economic environment of ruralites. Thus, there is the need for both formal and non-formal education in our rural areas — non-formal taking care of the out-of-school ruralites and functioning as supplementary to formal education in order to make the

latter more rural oriented.

### *Policy on Rural Education*

The goal of rural education may be considered as to provide qualitatively relevant and quantitatively adequate education to the ruralites. In order to achieve this goal should education in rural areas have different purposes and orientation from those which are conceived for pupils of other areas? Should the institutional structures be different for rural areas? During the colonial period rural education in a sense had an inferior status. What education was available in rural areas, was primary school education confined to the study of the three 'R's'. Further education always involved migration to cities. Today there has been tremendous development bringing some of the urban aspects of education into the rural areas. The question may be asked if rural education should follow the urban pattern. Should we have a distinct educational policy for rural education? The trend after independence has been towards having a unified national system of education. Nationalist spirit together with the problem of integration in the post-independence period has been a stimulating factor in favour of a unified system. It is true that for a country so vast and diverse some general principles may be necessary. Secondly, any special policy on rural education is likely to be opposed by the rural elite as discrimination against the ruralites. But the fact that urban oriented education has not been successful in the rural areas calls for special educational programmes for the ruralites as those of non-formal education, within the general national policy. Equality of educational opportunity is not ensured by merely making education equally accessible to both the ruralites and the urbanites. If education is not suited to the needs and environment of the pupils, it can only

create barriers to their educational achievement instead of realizing educational opportunity. The national policy on education, therefore, should take into account the characteristics and needs of the rural areas. The programme of making school education available to all, especially to those in rural areas within a reasonably short distance should continue. At the same time there should be a concerted effort to make use of non-formal educational programmes for the greater benefit of the ruralites. Although we need not have a separate policy for rural education, the national policy should be flexible in the case of rural education so that education can be functional to the rural man.

Some of the educational programmes recommended for school education are likely to make our formal education in rural areas less urban biased. They include work experience (recommended by the Education Commission 1964-66) or socially useful productive work (recommended by the Review Committee on the Curriculum for the Ten-Year School, 1977) and vocationalization of the higher secondary. The idea of work experience is that students while engaged in academic pursuit may not lose touch with what is practical; on the contrary, they should develop themselves into practical people and foster an attitude of respect for work especially manual labour. Socially useful productive work (while it maintains the basic objective of work experience, viz. to inculcate in the students the dignity of work and to make them practical) improves on work experience, in that it wants the work introduced in the schools to be useful to the community. The urban bias of correlating education of any level and kind to white collar jobs has been dysfunctional to rural development in the sense that education and the educated have remained alienated from agricultural occupation.

Work experience/socially useful productive work is an important programme that aims at dispelling this bias by getting the students involved in work that is useful to the local community and also by instilling in them an appreciation for manual work. The programme of vocationalization of the higher secondary (the +2 stage in the 10+2+3 pattern of education) is another scheme that is likely to make rural education more relevant and functional to the rural man. Vocationalization at the higher secondary has the objective of equipping the school leaver with the necessary knowledge and skill to enter the world of work either through employment or through self-employment; in its scheme vocations are to be selected on the basis of relevance to the needs of the immediate social environment and to the potentialities and interests of the individual. The emphasis on selecting vocations that are socially relevant makes vocationalization in rural areas rural based. The National Review Committee on Higher Secondary Education with Special Reference to Vocationalization (1978) in its report is all for rural vocationalization. It has strongly recommended the establishment of all the new higher secondary schools in rural areas and a number of agricultural vocational courses for the ruralites. If the programmes of work experience/socially useful productive work and agricultural vocationalization at the higher secondary are accepted as special rural schemes in our educational policy, rural education is likely to be more functional to the rural man and to contribute better to the rural and national development.

Another matter of policy is regarding higher and specialized professional education. At present institutions of higher education, especially professional education are concentrated in urban areas. Only the rural rich who can afford migrating

to urban centres are able to have such education. It is a luxury for the rural poor. Secondly, higher and professional education being urban based, there is a scarcity of professionals in rural areas. Even the professionals from rural areas themselves shun rural placement. In view of these facts should we not have a few institutions of higher and professional education in rural areas? Such rural centres of higher and professional education will be beneficial to the rural population. In view of the paucity of professionals in rural areas one could think of professional training in rural centres of higher education with a rural bias and possibly with some bond for rural service. An individual should be prepared to accept the curtailment of freedom to that extent for the greater good of the community.

### *Social Worker and Rural Education*

Ever since independence there has been a concerted effort to extend educational opportunity to all, especially to those in rural areas. But rural education in India has been facing various problems. Failure to enrol at all and large scale drop out are the major problems of rural education in India. There is no use blaming those involved in the planning and implementation of education for the failures. All those who are involved and interested in rural education — policy makers and executives, social scientists and social workers, and the public — should work in cooperation for the success of education in rural areas.

What can the social worker do in rural education? Broadly his role in rural education may be conceived of as triple: motivating the ruralites, acting as mediators between ruralites on the one hand and makers and executives of educational policies on the other, and being champions

of non-formal education. Motivation is an important factor in rural education. Large scale drop out and failure to enrol in school are to a great extent due to lack of motivation. Most of the children of school going age in rural areas are first generation potential learners and they lack any educational background within the family. It is necessary that both the parents be persuaded to send their children to school and the children be encouraged to go to school. The uneducated parents and their children by themselves may not be able to understand the purpose of education and what they can gain from it. It may be required to enlarge their vision beyond what is here and now and is immediately useful to them. This is something that the social worker can do. To create a positive and (not merely indifferent) attitude to education among the rural children and adults is a great step towards progress in rural education. Another category of persons who require motivation and encouragement is the rural teachers. Here too the social worker can play his role. Retention of children in school depends also on the teachers. The rural teachers must be made to understand fully the importance of their role in rural education. They should be convinced that they as teachers are involved in the personality development of the children and in the rural and national development. They should be made to appreciate their profession and perform their role in the best interest of the children and the nation. There is a tendency among the teachers in rural areas to get alienated from the local community and to seek transfer to urban areas. They should, on the contrary, be sympathetic to, and ready to serve, the rural community. One of the tasks, the social worker can do in rural education is to create social consciousness that is favourable to education, among those involved in rural



education — children, parents and teachers.

Secondly, the social worker can act as mediator between the ruralites and those who design and implement educational programmes. Under the Constitutional prescription of compulsory education for children upto 14 years, the value of equality of opportunity, and the ideology of rural development we have been vigorously trying to expand education to the ruralites. But we have not yet made any significant headway in this direction. It is not because there have not been policies and programmes or enough financial investment. Probably there has not been a fit between the policies/programmes and the rural situation. Policies framed on the basis of arm chair speculation or on the basis of feedback from urban situation are likely to meet with failure in rural areas. To be effective in rural areas, education should be relevant to the ruralites. It is necessary that the rural situation be studied and feedback obtained from already implemented educational programmes in rural areas, before any new policy is framed or any fresh programme is launched. This is an instance where the social worker can play a mediating role. The social worker, who is in a position to know the people, their needs and their attitudes, and who is aware of the successes and failures of educational programmes already introduced can advise the policy framers and planners of education on how education can be planned and made available to the ruralites. It demands of the social worker to be deeply

involved in the rural people and their educational development. If the social worker succeeds in rightly assessing the educational needs of the ruralites and in influencing those who plan and execute the educational programmes, rural education would be more relevant to the ruralites.

A third possible role of the social worker in rural education is in non-formal education. Non formal education for rural areas is conceived of as a mechanism to take care of some of the deficiencies of formal education. The characteristic feature of non-formal education is its flexibility to suit the needs of the learners. It is adapting education to the learner. It means that framing and conducting a programme of non-formal education is a highly imaginative and ingenious task. It presupposes a thorough knowledge about the needs of the learners and their environment, and their interest and availability for education. It also involves an examination of the points of failure of formal education in the particular situation. The social worker, who is interested in the rural educational development can study these things and help in the planning and introduction of non-formal educational programmes. Today there is widespread recognition of the need to have increased programmes of non-formal education in rural areas. The social worker's assistance in designing and launching such programmes will be a valuable contribution he can make to rural development.

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