

MASS EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA: EVOLUTION AND NEW STRATEGIES

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Introduction

The decades of the fifties and sixties were the period of an unshaken optimism shared by the developing nations of the world in the efficacy of education in promoting development. Symbolising this belief was the opening statement of the 1964-66 Indian Education Commission Report which dramatically observed that "The destiny of India is now being shaped in her classrooms".¹ As the evidence keeps pouring in of just what the formal education is doing and who they are benefiting, such optimism is no longer warranted.

While this blind faith in the contribution of education to the nation and the people as a whole has been shaken, few would hold the position that education has not contributed to development. Though some may agree with Ivan Illich's critique that the formal educational system has not promoted 'real' development and in fact is responsible for many of the ills of contemporary society, few would see the solution in his prescription that the nations of the world must abolish schooling and spin educational webs. The fact that no country has yet launched on such a radical programme reflects, in part, the belief that the formal educational system does have a role in promoting development. Such a view cuts across national boundaries and ideologies. For instance, after a period of relative neglect, China had made special efforts to revitalise its formal educational system as an integral part of its overall modernisation agenda.

The argument no longer is whether education can or does promote development. It does. The debate has shifted to the related issues of what is meant by development and whose development is being promoted. As John Simmons has observed:

Education can promote development, but it depends on how development is defined. If it is seen as mainly economic growth, which tends to benefit upper-income groups, then schooling has contributed to it by widening the skills and raising the productivity of future workers. If development is defined as mainly improving the standard of living of the poorest 40 per cent of the population, most of whom are mere illiterates or primary school drop-outs, then presumably formal schooling has not done much for them. In fact, the data shows that investment in education widens the gap between rich and poor in most countries.²

In India, over the last decade similar perspectives were being increasingly articulated. On the one hand, it was acknowledged that the formal system of education had to its credit some impressive achievements:

"As a result of the system of education that we have developed during the last 10 years, we have now more than 120 universities (or similar institutions), 4500 affiliated colleges, 40,000 secondary schools and 6,00,000 elementary schools, 3.5 million teachers, 100 million students and an annual expenditure of Rs. 25,000 million, which is next only to that on defence. It has given us a high level trained manpower whose size is the largest in the world and the top-levels of which are comparable to those of leading countries in the world. It is this manpower which now provides the key-personnel in all walks of our national life, and also enables us to help several developing countries.³

The same official document — the University Grants Commission's *Development of Higher Education in India: A Policy Frame* — has gone on to observe:

"Even in quantitative terms, it is mainly the upper and middle class that are the beneficiaries of this system. Sixty per cent of the population (age 10 and over) which is still illiterate, has obviously received none of its benefits. . . . 70 per cent of the seats in secondary schools and 80 per cent of the seats in higher education are taken by the top 30 per cent of income groups."¹

The above phenomenon illustrates the familiar phenomenon that the main beneficiaries of growth in post-independence India have been the upper and middle classes. It is now obvious that merely expanding the formal educational system does little for the welfare of the approximately 50 per cent of the population who live below the poverty line. Radical changes in the educational system are required if it is expected to contribute to the development of the impoverished half of our nation. But while such calls for transformation are as perennial as the rains, a certain shift in our educational priorities concretely reflected in programmes that have been implemented has taken place which give grounds for some hope for at least limited improvement.

One indication of this shift is the renewed national commitment to universalise elementary education and the special efforts to spread adult education. These programmes indicate that if education is expected to contribute to improving the quality of life of the masses, one cannot depend on the formal educational system alone to deliver the goods. A frontal attack on the problem is necessary using both formal and non-formal channels. In the Sixth Five Year Plan, 1978-83, both elementary education and adult education have been viewed as essential services for the impoverished sectors of the population and included in the Minimum Needs Programme.

This article delineates the attempt in post-independence India to provide a minimum basic education for its citizens. The attempt in India initially took the form of a major government programme to provide elementary schooling facilities. For a variety of factors which are discussed in the article elementary education failed to meet the nation's objectives of providing a basic minimum education for its future citizens. A major component of the new strategy is to include adult education as part of the national effort to provide mass education. The

article traces the evolution of this development and outlines the new strategy to promote a genuine mass system of education.

Mass Elementary Education in India

One of the perceived imperatives of nation-building in the modern world has been a commitment to mass elementary education. The ideology of universal elementary education has come to stay. At various stages of their development during the last two centuries nations have enjoined on themselves the task of providing universal elementary education for their future citizens. This has generally taken the form of legal provisions stipulating a minimum number of years of compulsory attendance in schools. The period of compulsory schooling and the extent to which compulsion has been enforced has varied. Developed nations have, as a result of various factors, stipulated longer periods of compulsion, including secondary education, than developing countries. What is more important is that the former have been more successful in enforcing universal compulsory schooling laws than the latter.

As has been the international experience, India too has accepted the ideology of universal elementary education. It has been almost three decades since this ideology was conferred legitimacy by the Constitution. Article 45 of the Directive Principles in the constitution states that:

The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.

Evolution of the Ideology of Universal Elementary Education

Prior to the establishment of colonial rule, there was a fairly large network of indigenous schools in India. These however progressively deteriorated in the face of competition from the primary schools established in the nineteenth century under British administration, and lack of government patronage. The progress of mass primary education during this phase of colonial rule was limited. A variety of factors contributed to this including the general poverty of the nation, the lack of interest in promoting mass primary education, limited finances and the neglect of indigenous schools.

Proposals to introduce compulsory education in the nineteenth century were turned down by the colonial authorities as being premature, Utopian and too costly. The fact that, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, England and various other countries had introduced compulsory educational measures influenced Indian nationalist opinion to agitate for similar measures. Amongst its earliest and staunchest advocates was Gokhale, who with other leaders like Vithalbhai Patel and the Maharaja Sayajirao of Baroda, moulded both public and government opinion. Moved by Vithalbhai Patel, the first successful bill on compulsory education came into law in 1918. Various states followed suit and introduced compulsory primary education laws. Article 45 of the Directive Principles of the

Indian Constitution was the culmination of this earlier struggle, and reflected the acceptances in principle on the part of the new Indian state to ensure a minimum education for all its future citizens.

This legal provision for compulsory elementary education does not mention either the lower-age limit or the duration of schooling. In the evolution of the ideology of universal elementary education in pre-independence the age-group 6-14 years came to be identified as the period of compulsory elementary schooling. Though never explicitly stated in the Constitution, eight years of free and full-time compulsory education for all the children of the age-group 6-14 years was the task set before the nation to complete by 1960.

It should be noted that the early pioneers like Gokhale and Vithalbhai Patel had argued for the introduction of compulsory and universal primary education.⁵ This primary stage of instruction varied from four to five years beginning normally with six years as the lower age limit. The longer period of universal elementary education — eight years of full-time education for the age-group 6-14 years — was accepted later in the forties since it was perceived as necessary to meet the economic, socio-political and pedagogical objectives of the Gandhian Scheme of Basic education. As argued by the Zakir Husain Committee, it was explained as follows:

Moreover we have chosen the 7-14 age-range because we consider it absolutely essential to keep the child at school until he is fourteen, in order to ensure that he will receive the essential modicum of social and civic training — which for psychological reasons is not possible earlier — in order to become a better citizen, that his literacy training will be thorough enough to make any lapse into illiteracy impossible, and he will acquire sufficient skill in his basic craft to practise it successfully if he adopts it as his vocation.⁶

The first Indian plan of educational development — the *Report of Post-War Educational Development in India* — popularly known as the Sargent Report — published in 1944 endorsed the scheme of Basic education and raised the number of years of full-time and free compulsory schooling to eight years for the age-group 6-14 years.⁷ This formed the essential feature of postindependence elementary educational policy which taking its cues from the Constitution expected that this task would be completed by 1960.

It should be noted that the goal of eight years of Basic education was far more ambitious and radically different from its colonial counterpart. Elementary education for the first time was attempted to be pressed directly into the service and development of the nation. In Gandhiji's view, Basic education was the spearhead of a silent social revolution. By providing for an ambitious curriculum which correlated craftwork, academic subjects and community activities, it expected to effect not mere incremental change but a radical transformation at the individual and societal level. This was a far cry from the goals of the traditional model which were more modest and which by and large was confined to an elementary knowledge of the 3R's.

Universal Elementary Education — Progress and Problems

By 1960 when all children in the age group 6-14 years were expected to be enrolled in schools, the nation was far from accomplishing this task. Target dates for universalising elementary education have since then been constantly revised. There has recently been a general consensus revealed in both official and quasi-official documents that it can and should be achieved by the end of this decade.

While on the quantitative front progress has been discouraging, the situation as far as the qualitative aspects was no less disappointing. It had been expected that by 1960 all elementary age children would be studying in Basic schools. By 1960, the vast majority of students and schools were still following the traditional pattern. The schools which were started or converted to the Basic Pattern were offering an education which was generally not very different in quality from the traditional pattern.⁸ This phase of Basic education was brought to a close by the 1964-66 Education Commission which pronounced its epitaph — "No single stage of education need be designated as Basic education".⁹ It however heralded in its new reincarnation work-experience which incorporated and updated the fundamental principles of Basic education. It was replaced with Socially Useful Productive Work which is expected to be more in consonance with the fundamental tenets and goals of Basic education, and is its most recent reincarnation.

Why has India not been able to universalise elementary education even two decades after the year it was expected to accomplish this task? What has been the achievements of elementary education in the last three decades of independence? An answer to these and other issues related to the progress and prospects of elementary education will be attempted.

Provision of Elementary School Facilities

One of the impressive achievements of elementary education has been the provision of school facilities. By 1974, the Third All India Educational Survey revealed that almost 93 per cent of the rural population was served by a primary section or school within their habitation or within a walking distance of 1.5 kilometres.¹⁰ Middle schools or sections served 86.91 per cent of the rural population either within their habitations or upto a distance of 5 kilometres walking distance from their residence.¹¹ According to the Third All India Educational Survey, the total number of recognised primary and middle sections in India were 5,30,867 and 1,19,798 respectively.¹²

Despite the tremendous effort to establish schooling facilities, even the necessary but not sufficient condition to universalise elementary education — the provision of an elementary school within easy reach of children — has not been fulfilled. There are many rural habitations which do not have easy access to either a primary or middle school. Almost 20 per cent or about 1.9 lakhs of the rural habitations in the country in 1974 did not have a primary section within 1.5 kilometres walking distance.¹³ The corresponding figures for habitations which do not have a middle school within five kilometres is almost the same."

There are considerable inter-state disparities in the lack of provision of facilities. In Himachal Pradesh, over 45 per cent of the rural habitations in which about 21 per cent of the population reside did not have a primary school within 1.5 kilometres walking distance in 1974. In Haryana, on the other hand, only one per cent of the rural population did not have such provision.¹⁵ Similarly, about 40 per cent of the villages in Madhya Pradesh in which about 28 per cent of the rural population reside did not have access to middle school facilities within a walking distance of 5 kilometres. The corresponding figures for Kerala were about 6 per cent and 3 per cent respectively.¹⁶

One cannot conceive of universalising elementary education unless children have easy access to schools. There are no easy solutions to this problem in a country where there are many competing demands on the nation's scarce resources, and the funds devoted to education are limited. The problem also is further complicated by the fact that provision of facilities to those habitations which do not have them will not appreciably increase enrolment. More than 99 per cent of the approximately 2 lakh habitations which do not have a primary school within walking distance of 1.5 kilometres has a population of 500 or less.¹⁷ The corresponding figure for similar small sized rural habitations which do not have a middle school within walking distance of 5 kilometres is approximately 83 per cent.¹⁸

Enrolment

Between 1950-51 and 1975-76, the increase in the number of children enrolled has been considerable. In 1950-51, the number of children enrolled in Stds. I-VIII was about 223 lakhs while the enrolment in 1975-76 was 817 lakhs. While the enrolment has more than tripled, in 1975-76 the proportion of children in the age group 6-14 years in Stds. I-VIII to the total child population in India of the same age-group was only 54.7 per cent.* The breakdown for Stds. I-V for the age-group 6-11 years was 62.6 per cent and for the age-group 11-14 years in Stds. VI-VIII was 21.7 per cent.¹⁹

Though almost half the students in the age-group 6-14 years are not enrolled in school, policies to universalise elementary education to be effective have to be aimed at specific groups and certain regions of the country. At an all-India level, the enrolment is lower in rural areas than in towns and cities. The Third All-India Educational Survey enrolment ratio for the age-group 6-11 in Stds. I-V was 63.2 per cent and the age-group 11-14 in Stds. VI-VIII was 22.1 per cent. While the corresponding urban enrolment ratios were 70.8 per cent and 43.9 per cent, the equivalent rural figures were 61.1 per cent and 16.9 per cent.²⁰

The enrolment varies also from state to state, and these disparities can be considerable. For instance, Bihar enrolls only 40.3 per cent of the children in the age-group 6-11 years in Stds. I-V and 12.4 per cent of the children in the

* This is a slight underestimate of the proportion of children who are enrolled at all levels of education in the age-group 6-14 years. It pertains only to the elementary stage of institution and does not take into account the proportionately very small number of children within this age-group who are in pre-primary standards or in high school.

age-group 11-14 years in Stds. VI-VIII. Kerala, on the other end of the spectrum, is much closer to the goal of universalising elementary education. The corresponding figures are 95.5 per cent and 68 per cent.²¹ The 1977 Working Group on Universalisation of Elementary Education has observed that nearly 74 per cent of the non-enrolled children are in eight States: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal.²²

Enrolment of the Weaker Sections

The groups identified as belonging to the 'weaker' sections of Indian society include women, scheduled castes and tribes. These groups have been identified in recent years as requiring special attention in terms of provision of elementary education. As the following figures reveal, in proportion to their counterparts, girls, scheduled caste and tribe children are prominent among those who do not for one reason or the other complete their elementary education.

In terms of their proportion to the total enrolments in Stds. I-V and Stds. VI-VIII, the third All-India Educational survey reveals that girls only constitute 37.7 per cent and 30.8 per cent respective of the total enrolment.²³ Girls are often either not enrolled or withdrawn from school before completing the primary or elementary stage of instruction. The 1977 Working Group on Universalisation of Elementary Education has estimated that about two-thirds of the non-enrolled children are girls.²⁴

The same is the case with scheduled caste and tribe students. In terms of their overall numbers in the general population both, especially the latter, are proportionately under-represented in the children enrolled in school. In Stds. I-V and Stds. VI-VIII, scheduled caste students constitute 13.2 per cent and 8.8 per cent of the total enrolment. The corresponding figures for scheduled tribe students are 5.8 per cent and 3.0 per cent respectively.²⁵

The pattern of enrolment in our elementary schools indicate that the problem is not of initial enrolment. Since over 90 per cent of the rural population has access to primary school facilities and periodic mass enrolment drives are undertaken, most children of the relevant age-group are enrolled in Std. I. The problem is that due to a variety of factors, many dropout before completing a few years of instruction. India has not been able to universalise elementary education because our elementary schools are unable to return their enrolled students. The 1977 Working Group on Universalisation of Elementary Education has delineated the dimensions of this problem:

Another factor which complicates the task and makes it difficult is the large proportion of dropouts. Out of every 100 children that enter class I, only about 40 complete class V, and only about 25 complete class VIII. The high proportion of dropouts has remained almost unchanged during the post-independence period and the problem has become quite intractable.²⁶

The major factors accounting for this dropout is poverty and the structural

limitations of our schools. Our schools require full-time attendance. Most urban and rural parents however require their children's services at home or at work and thus cannot afford to keep their children in school for the entire school day for eight years of continuous instruction. Girls are often expected to help out in domestic work. Children also directly or indirectly are expected to supplement meagre family incomes by working or freeing adults to work. One estimate of working children is about 70 per cent of the total number of children.²⁷ Consequently, many children are withdrawn in the early years of primary instruction before attaining an elementary level of literacy.

The fact that, for the poor in our country, schooling is not 'free' — the opportunity costs of education — principally accounts for the poor enrolment of the scheduled castes and tribes. As indicated earlier, they are under-represented in our elementary schools. These groups have been given considerable special benefits to promote their education: pre-matriculation scholarship, free text-books, free tuition fees, etc. This has been of considerable help to quite a few young scheduled caste and tribe students to pursue their education. For the large majority of them, however, the constraints of poverty have effectively reduced their ability to use these incentives and complete even elementary education.

While most states have attempted to provide free elementary education, the direct costs of education are still quite considerable. Though scheduled caste and tribe students pay little or nothing for their education, this is not the case with other students. While generally tuition fees are either not charged or are negligible in most of our elementary schools, parents still in the majority of cases have to pay for textbooks and uniforms. These act as a disincentive for many poor parents to continue their children's education.

While economic reasons principally account for poor enrolment, there are also other factors at work. Poor illiterate parents do not always insist or ensure that their children attend schools regularly. They also cannot help their children at home with their school work. Thus many poor children are unable to keep up with what is taught, fail and drop out of school. Cultural factors are noticeably at work in the case of girls whose education is not given the same priority as boys, and are prematurely withdrawn from school.

Our elementary schools are also responsible for the fact that they are unable to retain their students. Working on a full-time basis, they are structurally biased against the majority of our population who at the present stage of development cannot afford to send their children to full-time schools. Moreover in rural areas, school holidays do not take into account special periods during the year such as sowing and harvesting when children's services are especially needed.

While the government has made considerable efforts to provide schools and teachers to man them, the physical conditions of many of these institutions are substandard. Only about half of the nation's primary schools are housed in pukka buildings and as many as 27,707 primary schools have no building at all and claim to be running "in open space".²⁸ The provision of furniture, equipment, small libraries, and even blackboards are far from adequate. These conditions result from an attempt to expand schooling on shrinking budgets. During the last three decades of independence, the non-teacher expenditures has progressively

shrunk till it now accounts for less than ten per cent of the annual recurring expenditure on elementary education. This has meant that in 1975-76, India was spending annually only about one rupee per primary school pupil and two rupees per middle school pupil on equipment and appliances.²⁹

Moreover, even when elementary schools are provided with certain minimum facilities, there are many institutions where the environment can hardly be said to be conducive to learning. Authoritarian and unimaginative methods of teaching dreary and overcrowded classrooms are the rule rather than the exception. Few schools can really claim to engage the attention and develop the personalities of their students. There is evidence to indicate that Indian children are not learning as much as their international counterparts, and that there are serious deficiencies in their acquisition and application of skills in the 3R's.³⁰

The New Strategy

It has been realised for some time that the post-independence strategy of providing schooling facilities but only on a full-time basis was proving to be increasingly ineffectual. As the 1977 Working Group on Universalisation of Elementary Education has observed:

At present our motto is either full-time education or no education at all. This does not suit the hard realities of life because most children (about 70 per cent of the total) have to work in or outside the family and are therefore, compelled to dropout on the ground that they cannot attend on a whole-time basis. They could receive education on a part-time basis, but our system does not provide such education.³¹

The major change in post-independence elementary educational policy has been to acknowledge the deficiencies in the existing formal system of elementary education, and to recognise the need for complementary structures. What is currently visualised and being implemented in the last five years in various parts of the country are non-formal part-time courses of instruction organised around the convenience and needs of young learners. The Draft Five Year Plan, 1978-83, has enunciated the new strategy:

The rule will be that every child in the age-group 6-14 shall attend school, on a full-time basis if possible, and on a part-time basis, if necessary for those who cannot, mainly for economic reasons, attend full-time education. This will reduce drop-outs and wastage very greatly.³²

Both formal and non-formal channels of education are expected to further the goal of universalising elementary education. If the latter is provided the necessary infrastructure and funds, the role of elementary education in the development of the country will be considerably strengthened.

While these steps are to be welcomed the common problem, that India and many other developing countries face, is that since most children do not com-

plete elementary education, they assume adult roles without acquiring some of the basic knowledge considered to be necessary to perform them effectively. In India, until fairly recently, this type of relevant education for adults has been neglected. It is increasingly realised that it has been a serious error to depend almost entirely on the formal elementary educational system, and extensive efforts are now being made to implement adult education programme throughout the country.

Adult Education

Adult education, understood as imparting certain basic knowledge, is an important educational process. It is assumed that with this basic knowledge imparted through adult education an individual is enabled to lead a better human life — to be more efficient in his economic pursuits, more successful in his social relationships, and better equipped to exercise his rights and perform his duties.

Adult education is education of *adults*. But it is not the mere age of the learner that characterises adult education. If one goes by simple age of the learners, generally those in higher (university) education are adults. But university education is not adult education; nor are the learners in university education considered adult learners. A learner in adult education, as we understand here, is an adult (as different from child) who, having missed the education which he should have had as a child, is placed in a situation of disadvantage as a result of it. Basically, therefore, an adult learner is a person who is seeking to acquire certain basic knowledge in order to overcome this disadvantage. Thus, some of the essential contents of adult education are the same as those of elementary education for children.

Adult education is different from what is called incidental education, which is the life-long learning process undergone by both adults and children. As against incidental education, adult education is a teaching-learning process that has certain formally defined structure. At the same time it is education outside the formal school system. It is not incidental in so far as it has certain formally defined structures regarding teacher, contents and method of teaching. It is non-formal or outside the formal system, in the sense that its 'form' or structure regarding teacher, method, and contents is different from that of education in the school system.

As a non-formal educational programme adult education deviates from elementary school education in its definition of the method of imparting knowledge — its timing, duration and pedagogy. Adult education attempts to suit education to the needs and convenience of the adults. Hence the timing and duration of the programme are to be determined by the local needs. Thus, adult education programmes are generally held at night for men and in the afternoon for women. Care is taken to see that the educational programme does not collide with the economic pursuits and household responsibilities of the adults. Similarly, as far as the teacher is concerned it is not the educational qualification (as emphasized in the formal system) that is critical in adult education, but the competence and commitment of the person to function as a teacher of adults. He may or may

not be a degree holder. But he should be interested in adult teaching and capable of imparting the knowledge the illiterate and uneducated adults are in need of.

Although much of the basic contents of adult education are those of elementary education for children, their elaborations differ. In elementary education for children the focus is on inculcation of literacy, although preparation for assuming adult roles in the future is not excluded. In the case of adult education traditional literacy continues to be an objective. At the same time the focus is on enabling the adult to perform his adult roles better. That is why the adult education is often called functional education.

Historical Perspective

Adult education in India is not entirely a recent programme. Even during the British rule there were adult education programmes. Night schools were available for illiterate adults in the British presidencies of Bombay, Madras and Bengal. Adult education classes were in operation in some of the princely states too.

After independence, together with the efforts for national development, adult education programmes too were initiated. Social education for educating the illiterate adults was started* as the educational counterpart of community development programmes and land reforms. Government and various voluntary agencies with and without financial assistance from the government took up the massive task of adult education. Among the voluntary efforts mention may be made of the Literacy House, Lucknow, founded by Dr. (Mrs.) Welthy Fisher in 1953 to initiate action-oriented programmes of adult education. Farmers' Functional Literacy Programme, started in 1967-68, was a significant innovation in adult education on the part of the government. The objective of this programme was to help the illiterate farmers not only to acquire literacy but also to increase their productive potential in agriculture. This was an adult education programme for the rural areas. It had its counterpart in the urban areas, called Polyvalent Adult Education Centres. These centres were vocation-cum-general education programmes for urban workers with the objective of increasing their educational standards and productivity. Both the programmes had their focus on economic efficiency of the individual.

In 1975-76 another major adult education programme was launched by the government for the illiterates of the 15-25 years age group under the name of "Non-Formal Education". In contrast with the Farmers' Functional Literacy Programme and the Polyvalent Adult Education Centres, programmes under Non-formal Education were mostly confined to routine literacy. They also suffered from inadequate funds and poor supervision.

The above programmes had very little impact on adult illiteracy in India. In fact, during the first five Five Year Plans no serious effort was made for adult education. It was believed that universal elementary education of children in the age-group of 6-14 years would in course of time wipe out illiteracy in India. But failure to enrol many of the children in schools and large scale drop-out among those enrolled have frustrated the hope placed in elementary education. Thus a vigorous movement for mass education of adults was launched on October 2,

1978 under the name of National Adult Education Programme (NAEP).

The NAEP has set the target of educating 65 million illiterates in the age group of 15-35 years within five years. It has been planned and launched as a developmental programme at the national level. The immediate function of the NAEP is to educate adults. But its ultimate function is the transformation of the individual and societal change. The Government "Outline" visualizes the NAEP "as a means to bring about a fundamental change in the process of socio-economic development; from a situation in which the poor remain passive spectators at the fringe of the development activity to being enabled to be at its centre, and as active participants". As far as the individual is concerned, the NAEP is designed to raise one's social status, increase one's productive potentiality, enhance one's self-knowledge, and thus enable one to lead a better human life. A total transformation of the individual is envisaged through the NAEP. It is intended to uplift the illiterate adult. As far as the society is concerned, the NAEP is designed to bring about a radical change within the society by uplifting the weakest, poorest and lowliest sections of the society.

Contents of Adult Education in India

Historically, the focus of adult education in India has been gradually changing. In the beginning adult education was aimed at inculcating traditional literacy; later on in the sixties and the seventies it was thought that adult education should improve the productive potential of the individual. In the latest adult education programme in India a third dimension has been added — enhancing the adult's self-awareness and his knowledge about his social environment. Adult education today, therefore, is conceived not as a routine educational programme for making the illiterate adults literate, but as an educational process that is meant to transform the individual. Thus the recently introduced NAEP in India mentions functionality and social awareness as the two foci of adult education in addition to literacy. It is clearly stated in the Government "Outline" on the NAEP that the "learning process involves emphasis on literacy, but not that only; it also stresses the importance of functional upgradation and of raising the level of awareness regarding their predicament among the poor and the illiterate".

There is no ambiguity or confusion regarding what constitutes traditional literacy. It consists of the skills of the three R's — reading, writing and arithmetic. This is the aspect of adult education that brings it closest to elementary education of children. It is accepted that every adult today should possess the skills of literacy. It is also accepted that an adult today requires, besides literacy, knowledge which he is not likely to acquire through simply living in the society (or through incidental education). Functionality and social awareness, as enunciated in the NAEP, represent this area of knowledge.

There has not been clear-cut definition of functionality and social awareness. At times no distinction is made between the two. Both functionality and social awareness are concerned with knowledge necessary to live successfully in one's socio-economic environment. Those who conceptually make the distinction between functionality and social awareness, understand by the former, knowledge

concerned with the economic environment, which directly goes to make a man functional in his economic pursuits. For example: a farmer is equipped to be more productive in farming, a low income man is made aware of the facilities available to him from the banks, co-operatives and such institutions, an uneducated person is made aware of the benefits of saving and given the knowledge of where and how he can save, an unemployed person is taught for self-employment, etc. Social awareness is directly concerned with the social environment. It constitutes knowledge regarding one's rights and duties, and knowledge about one's own community—customs, practices, values, and ideologies. For example, the adult is taught the evils of superstition, alcoholism, exploitation of the poor and the weak, injustice, and discrimination against the lowly on the one hand, and the values of rationality, integrity, justice and equality on the other. Social awareness, thus, is to make the individual so exposed to the social environment as to enable him to critically understand it and act accordingly.

The NAEP is accepted as the major adult education endeavour in India today. The nation relies very much on the NAEP for the eradication of illiteracy in India. The programme has been in operation for about three years. Reports from the States say that thousands of adult education centres have been started by various government and non-government agencies. Evaluation studies of the NAEP conducted in some of the States in India show that the programme has concentrated on literacy and has generally neglected the other two contents, viz. functionality and social awareness. Concentration on literacy has been at times the result of the assumption that, unlike functionality and social awareness, literacy can be acquired only through direct teaching. At other times non-availability of competent persons has been the reason for the neglect of functionality and social awareness. Pre-occupation with literacy is likely to weaken the focus of the NAEP as a movement for individual and societal transformation.

The special target groups identified in the NAEP are women and scheduled castes/scheduled tribes. Going by the evaluation studies one can say that, while the NAEP has been fairly successful in the enrolment of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, it is yet to make the effort to mobilise women for the programme. As the number of illiterates in India is much larger among women than among men, the NAEP cannot claim success, unless significantly larger number of women are covered under the programme and educated.

Another significant observation made by the evaluation studies is that the NAEP is getting increasingly bureaucratized and thereby the initial enthusiasm and interest of the people in it are gradually fading away. Efforts must, therefore, be made to maintain the NAEP as a movement which sustains the enthusiasm and commitment of the various agencies and personnel involved in the programme and not to routinize it by excessive centralisation and bureaucratization.

Adult Education for Development

Literacy, functionality and social awareness, as contents of adult education in India today, are not ends in themselves. They are means for the individual to function in his socio-economic environment. It is expected that a person applies

in his life the skills of literacy, and the knowledge pertaining to functionality and social awareness and leads a better human life. Adult education, therefore, is not merely transmission of information; it is enabling the person to act — to read/write/count when the occasion arises, to be more productive and to raise his economic status, to resist evils and what is wrong, and to accept desired values. The success of adult education, therefore, is to be measured in terms of not only the amount of knowledge imparted, but also the kind of life that the learners have been made capable of leading. It is assumed that without the acquisition of these contents of adult education the illiterate adults would not be able to lead a really human life. That is why adult education is considered to be a basic service to illiterates and included in the Minimum Needs Programme.

In view of the fact that the vast majority of the Indian population is illiterate, adult education is considered an important developmental programme in India. Often economic and political programmes meet with failure to achieve their objectives. One of the reasons why the prospective beneficiaries fail to profit from the developmental programmes is that they suffer from the disadvantage of being illiterate and uneducated. How will the poor benefit from economic programmes, if they do not know how to make use of them? It has been found that many a developmental programme in India does not reach the poorest and weakest sections of the society, because these sections of the society lack the education needed to have success to such programmes. Developmental agencies have come to realize that a minimum level of education of the masses is a prerequisite, although not a sufficient condition, for their socio-economic development. How is a man going to develop himself, unless he is made aware of his situation in the society and convinced that he has to uplift himself. This self-awareness is the first step. When a man is convinced that he needs development, then he requires the means — the developmental programmes. At this stage it is critical that he has the knowledge of how he can benefit from the developmental programmes. In other words, the man who requires development, should be convinced of it and know what means are available to achieve this objective and how to utilize them. This is the thrust of the stress on functionality and social awareness in adult education.

Conclusion

Clearly the new strategy is qualitatively very different from the initial post-independence efforts to promote mass education. The earlier strategy relied almost exclusively on the formal elementary educational system to provide the basic minimum education for the nation's future citizens. The country has paid a great price for this narrow focus. By 1971, the rate of literacy was only about 30 per cent. More than half the number of illiterates in the world are Indians.

The new strategy of mass education has as a major objective removal of this tremendous backlog of illiteracy. In this perspective, both adult and elementary education are complementary programmes. But both programmes aim at going beyond literacy and providing at least a minimum education for the nation's present and future citizenry. The focus on non-formal channels in adult education

and to a lesser extent in elementary education is significant. It represents the first concerted attempt in our nation's history to make education directly accessible to the poorest sections of society. It is hoped that this commitment to mass education will be maintained and strengthened.

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