

Problems And Remedy

Compulsory Primary Education

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IT cannot be denied that every citizen of our country must be literate. For that we cannot go ahead with any development plans and programmes with illiterate citizens. But unfortunately, about 74% of our people are still illiterate.

The government from time to time took both administrative and academic actions with a view to eradicating illiteracy within a stipulated period which is now the end of the year 2000.

The government set up a separate Directorate for primary education for implementing the plans and programmes of primary education. The government also decentralised the primary education administration and management, transferring primary education to the upazila parishads. Further, the government has given priority to primary education in the perspective Five Year plan.

Different governments at different periods set up National Education Commissions which unequivocally said that priority must be given to primary education and accordingly some priority was given. But the result was not up to the mark.

The main reasons for failure were assumed to be the lack of initiative of the guardians to send their children to schools and allow them to continue upto class V. The dropout between class I and V is still serious.

Perhaps it is for such reasons that the different Education Commissions recommended that the primary education must be made compulsory and the different governments from time to time emphasised this point. But no government in the past made the primary Education compulsory. The present government, however, passed an Act making primary education compulsory and it is said that the Act will be implemented with effect from January, 1991. Undoubtedly this action of the government is creditable and admirable.

It may be remembered that in the past some action, in different forms was taken for eradicating illiteracy. For example, it was decided by a previous government that every S.S.C. student must make two illiterate persons literate before getting the certificate. But, in practice, this action was not effective and successful. There are reasons for this but this paper is not going to deal with them here. This paper deals with the

probable difficulties in implementing the provisions of the Act making primary education compulsory.

First of all, what is the assumption behind making the primary education compulsory? The assumption seems to be that in spite of efforts made by the government, the people specially at the villages do not send their children to school and do not allow them to continue study upto class V. If this be the assumption, the action of the government is a correct one. This means people can send their children to school and they have the capability, specially, financial, to do so but they do not. So they must be directed by law to do the needful i.e. send their children to school. The action of the government, therefore, is fully justified and then there will be little problem implementing the provisions of the Act.

Real Problem

But what is the real problem? The real problem is that in almost all cases at the village level, the guardians, in spite of being aware of the importance of literacy and education, cannot send their children to school. The main reason is their poverty. If the children remain at home, they can help their parents in earning their livelihood. But if they send their children to school they miss the earning and in addition they have to spend some money in buying the dress, providing tiffin and pens, pencils etc. though they have not to pay for the books and tuition fees. Thus by sending children to school they are hard hit. In fact, they are not financially capable to send their children to the schools and allow them to continue upto class V in order to complete the cycle of the first stage of literacy.

It may be suggested that the government may provide free dresses, tiffin, pens and pencils also. Getting everything free — free tuition, books, dress and tiffin, pen and pencils, the guardians will have nothing to say against sending their children to school.

Here the question that arises is, is our government financially sound to bear the cost of making all those things free? There is already resource constraint. The government can manage finance by stopping the establishment of so many college

which produce little quality education, diverting funds from the subjects which are said to be unproductive and even from Family Planning Department because, 'after all, education is the key to the solution of the No. 1 problem i.e. population problem in our country. In fact, if the people can be made literate and educated, there will be little need for Family Planning Department Division Ministry. People by themselves will solve the problem of population. Still the problem is not solved. After providing free tuition, free books, free dress, free tiffin and pens, pencils etc., can we expect that all the guardians will allow their children to continue the study upto class V and complete the first stage of the primary education cycle? The answer, to my mind, is not certain.

There may be reasons for this. The guardians who will be compelled by law to retain their children at school upto class V only and will not be able to proceed beyond that may certainly raise the question — how will their children be benefitted having education upto class V? Education upto class V will not bring any job for them and benefit them economically except that they will have become literate. Moreover, studying upto class V, they will hesitate to go back to farming as a sense of dignity of labour is yet to develop in our country. They are then likely to create unrest in the villages in different ways.

The government may offer stipends and grants for further studies only to those who are meritorious by a certain standard to be fixed. But these meritorious students also after continuing studies, say, upto S.S.C., H.S.C. and even Degree level are not expected to get employment under the present socio-economic conditions and population growth.

Solution

Thus, ultimately, the economic question is the predominant one concerning implementation of the provisions of the Act. Under the circumstances, the proper solution seems to be the introduction of compulsory vocational training on carpentry, farming, tailoring, cottage industry, wiring etc. upto class V. In that case, those who cannot proceed to higher education after class V will not be a

burden to their guardians and society. They will be, rather productive force. Here, for example, the Pathokoli Model may be cited as a striking example to be followed. Such an action will certainly stop the process of dropout by encouraging both the guardians and the students who will not suffer so much from the fear of unemployment.

The introduction of compulsory vocational training together with general education will also benefit those who will be able to receive higher degree because when these degree holders will be officers and employees under public and private organisations shall not have to depend on others so much for the solution of the petty technical problems generally faced in their day to day life.

In order to make the Compulsory Education Act a success other facilities, and techniques will have to be adopted. From the personal experience of the author, it has been clear that in most of the schools at the village level, there is a great dearth of physical facilities such as furniture, toilets, tubewells and school-house/building. Students were seen to sit on the floor and suffer for want of toilets and tubewells.

Finally, the question of motivation and persuasion is not less significant in applying the Act. Many of the village guardians suffer from inertia

Here the questions of motivating the guardians is important. Now who will motivate them? The motivation shall have to be done by officers, teachers and political and local leaders.

It may be remembered that our country is an underdeveloped one and hence we cannot adopt and implement successfully plans and programmes for development but our underdeveloped management system is more responsible for the unsuccessful implementation of several plans and policies of the government. Therefore, management training not only for motivating which is a small part of management but also for other parts of management should be imparted to the officers, teachers and political and local leaders more seriously effectively and systematically and without any abrupt change in the policy as it was done under Third Five Year Plan (1985-1990).