

Thoughts On Education

—Jawadur Rahman

LIKE any other social problem the problem of illiteracy also cannot be solved in isolation. It can be said without fear of contradiction that the rate of literacy in a society largely depends on the socio-economic condition of the broad masses. Until this condition improves the goal of total literacy is most likely to remain a fleeting shadow. There is a proposal of universal primary education since the British period but there has been little achievement to that end. There is no legislation yet providing for compulsory free primary education. True. But would such legislation alone ensure education of all those children who now go without schooling? Certainly not. Other measures, besides increasing school accommodation, must precede such legislation if it has to be meaningful. Have we succeeded in doing away with the social evil of dowry by prohibiting it by law? The answer is known to all.

What we should do is: While preparing grounds for cent per cent literacy through universal primary education to be introduced

ed in course of time, we should now take measures to minimize the rate of dropouts from school at primary level. Hundreds of thousands of the children of school-going age never go to school primarily because of the poverty—and what goes with it—of their parents. And not more than 30 per cent of those children who are enrolled in the primary classes continue their studies beyond class V. If we could retain at school for five years all those who are enrolled in class I, that itself would be revolution; indeed. Now, why do children drop out of school—many even before reaching class III? Poverty of the parents is of course a big factor responsible for the situation. But there are other factors, too. A child of poor but educated parents is likely to stay at school up to a minimum level even if it may mean semi-starvation of the family. But the child of poor and illiterate parents is very likely to discontinue his studies after a year or two of enrolment. He may be simply frightened away from school and welcomed back home by his parents and quickly engaged on the farm or asked to

supplement the family income in whatever meagre way it may be. Frightful experience at school is no doubt a factor that induces many of the children of poor and illiterate parents in the rural areas to give up education as a pursuit.

Think of a child who goes to school half-fed, returns home exhausted and sits down to prepare lengthy home tasks. He gets no guidance from his parents because they are illiterate, nor does he get help from a private tutor since the family is too poor to engage one. Next morning the child goes to school ill-prepared only to be rebuked—or even caned by teachers. Soon he loses all interest in education. He starts hating his school, fearing his teachers and may ultimately stop going to school to avoid embarrassment. The burden of books and the use of cane thus create a situation which makes school-going a fearful experience for many. With a balanced curriculum and a better method of teaching the situation would have been different.

The practice of assigning lengthy tasks to be learnt at home, many a guardian feels, has a negative effect on the

mind and body of the children. Teachers had better get them learn their lessons in class as far as practicable, of course—so that after day-long studies at school they do not find home as only an extension of the class room. The case of older students is, however, different.

The present curriculum shall have to be revised keeping in view the hard reality that most of our children suffer from malnutrition and most guardians are both illiterate and too poor to hire expert service of private tutors. It will not be irrelevant to mention in this context that the changes introduced in the school curriculum in the recent past, instead of making learning easy, made it more difficult than it used to be. Was it necessary to include, for instance, difficult topics on the theoretical aspects of number in mathematics for the primary classes?

Now that the school curriculum is going to be revised with in the framework of a new education policy to be introduced in the country, the authority concerned, we hope, will give a serious thought to this and similar other issues.