

Primary education in Bangladesh

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Education is traditionally regarded as a social obligation of late, it has come to be deemed as an essential pre-requisite in the process of the development. Countries which have made rapid economic and social progress are significantly those that have devoted a great deal of attention to education.

Education is an investment and a pre-condition to improve the conditions of backward sections.

Education is a must and right of a citizen. The constitution of Bangladesh stipulates for free and compulsory education to all children up to an age as may be determined by educational authorities for removal of illiteracy from the country. It urges uniform, mass-oriented universal system of education suited to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens.

All citizens, should be afforded opportunity for formal education, at least, an open door education policy upto the primary level. Education must be responsive to the needs of the nation and will prepare students for future productive employment. It should be geared up to turn out skilled personnel and not educated unemployment.

Emphasis on vocational and technical training should be laid down. Community Laboratories and workshop and improvement of school and college laboratories intensification and practical courses will go a long way to improve the quality of education.

The prevailing formal primary education system with 46 thousand primary schools along with 19,5000 teachers have the potentiality of imparting education to most of the children (6-10 years) and their right to a minimum formal education in the country. In 1990, the number of govt. and non-govt. primary schools was 37,616 and 9000 respectively. On the other hand, the number of govt. primary school was 39 thousand and non-govt. primary school was 29694 in 1947. In 1948, the number of total school going students (both sex) was 59 lakh 79 thousand which in turn has now increased to 1 crore 44 lakh 97 thousand students in Bangladesh. The number of primary school was 290 and the total number of school going students (both sex) in primary school was 87 lakh 97 thousand 830 in 1970. In spite of 18% allocation in the first five year plan and 47% in the second five year plan and 46% in the third five year plan respectively for primary education, out of the total outlay for education sector, universal primary education programme has not performed and improved satisfactorily. All the previous plans and programmes indicate about non-formal education as an alternative delivery system for providing education and skill training to the vast multitude of illiterates who are outside the purview of formal education frame of the

country. But no such concerted efforts has yet been made to plan and implement a comprehensive programme on non-formal education. There is a project which has some resemblances of non-formal education, is the center based adult literacy activities conducted through Mass Education project that was launched in 1980, discontinued in 1982 and revived again in 1987.

Education is the backbone as well as foundation of a nation. If a nation is to be improved and self-dependent through mass oriented education we must emphasis on implementation of the universal and compulsory primary education. Primary education is the foundation of education system in any country. As much as the foundation of any country is so strong, that country will be able to build up so much enlightened citizen in future. If primary education is to be made universal and compulsory, a few practical measures must be taken such as: (a) the number of primary education school will be increased in accordance with the ratio of population in the country; (b) the non-govt. primary schools which are still now neglected will have to be upgraded and the payscale and other allowances of the teachers of these schools are to be finalised very soon for gearing up the activities of the school well (c) a necessary steps have to be taken in this context so that the guardians can send their children to school. (d) If required, the local govt. administration will have to be empowered to enforce moral and social obligation on the guardians for implementation of this principle.

A social movement, and a comprehensive publicity should be launched to motivate the local leaderships in the remote corner of the village so that they can create real consciousness among the universal education among the common people. The above mentioned steps may be taken in a well-planned way so that the education can be ensured by the year 2000. The main reason and factor for non-attainment of primary education is the inequitable nature of formal system and its inefficiency and inability to reach, and offer the vast majority of the people. Out of an estimated 1.51 crore primary age group children (6-10 years) about 1.14 crore are enrolled in 1990 leaving another 37 lakhs outside the purview of formal schooling. While the estimated gross enrolment rate is

about 74 percent and almost 65 percent of them drops out, the large organised system produced an output of mere around 25 percent of the enrolled children who complete the 5 years cycle. Wastage is alarming. Out of an estimated 4.80 crore adolescents, youth and adult, representing the most productive age-group of population about 3.40 crore are illiterates.

The percentage of illiteracy increased from 78.90 pc. to 82.39 percent during 1951-61 and enrolment in primary schools rose from 26 lakhs to 60 lakhs between 1947 and 1973. About 58 percent of the present primary age-group population are enrolled in schools. The number of primary schools declined from 29633 in 1947-48 to 26665 in 1960-61. The number of primary schools was 30,446 in 1972-73. Since the mid fifty efforts had been going on to reconstruct about 15000 of the primary schools and to provide each of them with 5 teachers. The financial provision for instructional materials, text books, qualified teachers and their training has been extremely in adequate all through.

The primary education was much neglected in our present Bangladesh due to wrong policy adopted by the then govt. of Pakistan in comparison with that of west Pakistan. Due to wrong policy of the then govt. of Pakistan the basic principle of the education was not matched with the system prevalent in Bangladesh. The govt. of Bangladesh has taken up a broad based plan to expand the primary schools on the basis of population and to cope with it.

According to historical review, the past efforts indicate that between 1951-81 the literacy rate for age groups 5% increased from 21% to 23.8% i.e. 2.8 during the last 30 years. The adult literacy rate was 29.2% in 1981 (census). The estimated weighted average adult literacy rate is around 31% in 1990 the ratio between male and female being 40% and 22% respectively. If we go through the history of other countries in the world, we find that no single country had universal primary education some 130 years ago. In France they Law of 188 abolished fees in all primary schools and the law of 1882 established compulsory attendance. In England the Elementary Education Act of 1870 laid the foundation upon which elementary education was

made compulsory throughout England and Wales and in 1891 fees were abolished in all but a few elementary schools. It took about 32 years to attain universal primary education in England about 45 years in Sweden. In the Indian sub-continent under the British rule a bill on compulsory primary Education was first introduced in the parliament in 1912, but lost. 78 years later, compulsory primary education Act 1990 was passed in the parliament of Bangladesh, which came into force from January 1, 1991.

A well informed circle is of opinion that it will be very difficult to enforce the law and ensure compulsory primary education by the year 2000. Out of the total population of 11.4 crore, about 49% are girls and women. It is encouraging that the proportion of enrolment of girls at the primary level increased from 36% in 1975 to 37% in 1980, 40% in 1985 and 44% in 1990. To attain the universal primary education and literacy within a short time, the base development must be retained and expanded. The current enrolment rate of about 74% must be enhanced to about 90% by the year 2000. During the nineties primary education has started widespread by making it universal and visibly relevant. Retention and expansion of the enrolled students will contribute to the success of universal primary education and literacy. Continued participation by the parents, parent Teachers Association school management committee and communities need to be encouragingly involved in the vital process of education for all through both formal and non-formal channels. Education for all in Bangladesh aims to provide basic education to all children (aged 6-11 with 8 years schooling) youth and adults.

The present status of education by the year 2000 would essentially imply attaining an intermediate target of universal primary education for childrens 6-10 years literacy and life skills for adolescents (11-14 years) functional literacy for youths and adults (age-15+) Both formal and non-formal channels will be utilised in future.

According to census of 1974 which explained literacy as the ability to read and write a language and attain minimum numeracy skill, showed that merely 25.8 of the population

over 15 years of age were, literate. As per 1981 census, the rate for same age group had risen to 29.2% an increase of only 34% in seven years. While the number of adult literate increased from 9 million in 1974 to over 13 million in 1981 (an increase of 42%) the number of illiterates grew from over 27 million to almost 33 million, an increase of almost 20%. Although the adult literacy rate increased to about 31% in 1990, the total number of illiterates in the country still stands at an alarming figure. The real fact that the literacy rate is still around 30 percent. In fact with the increasing emphasis which has been given to universal primary education during the last two plan periods (1980-85 and 1985-90) mere limited non-formal activities (adult education programme) were conducted to complement the formal system, while the same of non-governmental organisation activities truly reflected the adult literacy programme without any govt. policy and guidance. A renewed national commitment will be needed to support the concept of less organised and more flexible non-formal education as a viable complement to the formal system to help improve the adult literacy from prevailing 30 percent to about 50 percent by the year 2000.

Implementation of compulsory primary education Act 1990 is considered to be a major strategy for universalising primary education. The basic learning needs of youths and adults are diverse and should be met through a variety of delivery system. Literacy programmes are indispensable because literacy is a necessary skill in itself and the foundation of others life skills.

A practical measure may be adopted to gear up the primary education in full swing in the following:

(a) Each Mosque of Bangladesh may be used as primary school upto class V for imparting primary education to the children (6-10 years) from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m. through out the whole year.

(b) Other media of primary education such as, Ebtedayee, Madrassah, Village Madrassah and Maktab Satellite Schools, community based instruction, Radio, Television, each community centre also can meet the basic learning needs of children.

(c) A knowledgeable circle is of opinion that the govt. should have abroad based plan to set up

voluntary primary schools at each village of Bangladesh with the financial assistance of UNICEF, CARE, OXFAM, N.G.O. Bureau, the Asia Foundation and other organisations along with the donation and contribution by indigen out well-to-do persons like the Path Kali Trust formed during the regime of former govt.

(d) The village and local leadership should be involved to look after and manage—these voluntary primary schools at each village in collaboration with the villagers for gearing up formal and non-formal primary education.

(e) A permanent fund for these voluntary schools may be raised for giving a monthly allowance to the teachers and for maintaining non-recurring expenditure of these schools.

(f) Each student of these schools should be given full uniform and fifteen charge without any cost or from the fund of school so that the boys and girls can be encouraged to attend school regularly.

(g) The village, and the local leadership should create a provision of cultural amusement at each voluntary school for enhancing more encouragement of the students (both sex) to attend the school everyday for learning lesson.

(h) Adult education programme may be implemented to literate the adults in second shift of the voluntary schools.

We should follow the footprints of a developed nation like Japan in regards of rapid spread of education and industrialisation at all levels. We may cite an example that after the second world war, the very Japanese people started their economic life from "O" point and now they stand as a super nation in all respects, specially in industrialization as well as education in the third world. They have advanced their lives rapidly in all respect because they are very honest and sincere. Their leadership is so honest and sincere that there is no scope for a man to be dishonest and insincere in their society. My question is this how Japan could become a super nation within a short time, if we analyse their background history we can easily find out the clue that they are very hardy and laborious and sincere in their jobs which in crown them with success. The Japanese people have now crossed the impassable roads and bridges and overcome the final stage of development as a super nation in the Third World.

Bangladesh, is blessed with natural resources like gas, oil and limestone and cheap manpower. Now the question is why we are not able to do our jobs like the Japanese people for the prosperity of our people. It is hoped that the present government will be able to resolve the problems confronting us and help implement programmes of compulsory and universal primary education in the country.