

Educational Deprivation And Literacy

S. B. Barua

THE present government has made sincere efforts both for the universalisation of primary education for children and non-formal primary education for the age-group 6-14 years and functional literacy for adults. At present, about 63% children in the age-group 6-10 years and about 37% in the age-group 11-14, are going to school.

In spite of all these efforts, our literacy rate is quite low. Approximately 24% people in our country are literate. There is a heavy rate of wastage in the primary school. Most of the children drop out before completing their primary education. Many others repeat and thus stagnate. The rate of educational deprivation upto class V is roughly 60% and upto class VIII 75%. This phenomenon defeats our efforts towards universalisation of primary education.

The rate of educational deprivation is high in the tribal areas, rural areas, hill tracts, urban slums, coastal areas and in the case of girls. There are broad reasons for educational deprivations viz.: economic, social and educational. The major problem is how to relate education to the socio-economic development of children and the community as a whole. Several programmes have been launched for the universalisation of primary education.

A massive programme of teacher-orientation has been started by the government in order to motivate and enthuse the teachers and to develop expertise in them, to make the teaching-learning process effective to bring about a transformation in education by relating it to socio-economic development and thus achieving the target of universalisation of primary education. The teacher force is also being utilized for the enrollment of children in the primary schools.

Primary school buildings have been provided within the working distance of roughly 1.5 kilometres from the home of the child in all parts of the country. Several incentive programmes like the provision of midday meals, free textbooks, free uniform and Ashram school in trivial areas, etc., have been started. Non-

graded school system has been introduced partially or fully in some areas according to which the children are allowed to be promoted from one class to another according to their own place, without failing them.

Presently a National Council of Educational Research and Training Cell is badly needed to prepare a "Framework for the Ten-year School Curriculum" which explains, besides several other things, how education can be used as powerful instruments of change and development and in this matter of development, how the school should seek the cooperation of the community. Besides subjects like language and arithmetic, due emphasis has been laid on work experience and environmental studies, which include science and social studies, health education, arts and games. Importance has been laid on modern values like national integration, secularism, socialism, democracy, etc., besides the traditional values of our country. Importance has not only been attached to the context but due emphasis has been laid as well on the teaching-learning process. As has been said above, in primary classes, environmental studies have been introduced. This allows the children to learn through self-exploration of nature and the environment, under the proper guidance of the teacher. Thus, there is automatically more emphasis on learning rather than on teaching.

Here the teacher has to keep himself abreast with the latest knowledge so that he may be able to guide and help inquisitive and inquiring minds, who put up a volley of questions during their study. Work experience allows the children to receive education through such work as based on modern techniques of science and technology. New approaches to evaluation have been introduced by grading system and internal assessment for the all-round development of the child.

From what has been said above, one may expect that through the various efforts of the government, teachers and voluntary organizations, the rate of enrollment in primary school will go higher and the educational deprivation rate will come down in the near future. All

said and done, still in this vast country, where most of the children are first-generation-learners, there will be casualties. Many children and adults will be deprived of education.

There are millions of children who are the dropouts from the primary schools. There are millions of young parents who are illiterate. The major problem of the country is how to impart education to such drop-out children in the age-group 6-14 years, who have left the primary school before completing primary education and, equally well, to their illiterate parents. The government has taken a decision to implement programmes for the education of the dropout children, as well as illiterate parents.

As far as the education of the dropout children in the age-group 6-14 years is concerned, it is necessary to give them education in order to enable them to complete their education upto class V or class VIII, in order to enable to go up from class VI or class IX respectively, as the case may be, so that then may continue their education. This is called multiple-point entry.

These drop-out children cannot be given education in the formal schools for two reasons. One is the rigidities and the constraints of the formal system. These children would like to come to the school for studies at such hours when they are free from their domestic work. Experience tells us that they would require part-time condensed courses, which would have a direct bearing on their socio-economic educational needs. No parent would like to send his drop-out children to school unless he is convinced that education will help in the socio-economic and educational development through work experience and community development programmes. In Kalihati village of Tangail district, the community members said that they would send their wards to the non-formal education centre provided education bring about economic and social transformation. The second reason is that these children can not be put in a particular class of a formal school as their level of achievement does not fit a particular class. Therefore, non-formal education is necessary. This point

has been explained further in this continued write-up, in the later part, where the procedure for dividing the children in different groups has been dealt with.

Non-formal education programmes are also very necessary for adults in the age-group 15-45 years so that they may acquire the minimum skills and knowledge which are important for leading a good life. These adults cannot study in the existing primary schools partly because they are engaged in their work for earning their livelihood and partly, they require a much different type of education which can be provided alone through non-formal approach. This programme will have a two-fold advantage. First, the adults themselves will become functionally literate and secondly, they will realize the value of education and send their children to school willingly.

There is also need for education of young children in the age 0-3 years and 3-6 years and that of their mothers. Again, at those stages one cannot use a formal system of education. The mothers need orientation regarding health, nutrition and care of their children and of themselves. For the children in the age group 3-6 years, again, health nutrition and care are important both for children and their mothers. Besides, one has to take due care of the child in this age-group regarding his cognitive, social, emotional, physical and aesthetic development.

In our formal schools too, education may be related to the socio-economic development of the country. It may be regarded as second-hand education. In fact, a successful implementation of such programmes of education will prove to be more effective, useful and functional. The above facts on the approach to the non-formal education programme for the drop-out children in the age-group 6-14 years has been explained on the basis of experience gained not only in Kalihati and some other villages at Tangail but also the whole of the country.

Non-formal education is necessary for all and for all times to come. The spirit of non-formal education is essential for eventual diversification.