

Knowledge knows no frontiers. Today human civilization has made a giant leap forward. Scientific development and technological breakthrough are taking mankind to a new height. But all this development has sprung from spread of education.

But unfortunately our country is lagging behind in the field of basic education. Poverty coupled with legacy of a colonial past have made the situation more pathetic. "Bangladesh leaves in villages", says a proverb. But the tillers of the soil who constitute the vast majority of our countryside are still steeped in darkness. We have achieved independence 15 years ago, before that we had the accumulated experience of the then East Pakistan. But progress in the field of literacy is still fragment of the dimension to be achieved.

"Charity begins at home" So, we should ourselves make the edifice of education try to banish the cause of illiteracy and build a happy society. To achieve this objectives, we will have to work hard, very hard.

In fact, literacy is the mirror of social and economic progress of a country. Though at a glance it seems that humanity is making a bold stride, yet the total picture, if taken into account is not so bright.

Of the world's total adult

A profile of

population, about 40 per cent cannot read or write. The proportion of illiterate population in developing country is between 50 to 80 per cent. In Bangladesh, the percentage of literate people aged five years and above is 26.

It comes to 22.1 per cent when the total population is taken into consideration. This picture is really shocking when judged in the perspective of the world scenario. As to the causes behind this, colonial legacy may be cited as a major factor. During the Second World War (1939 to 45), the attention of the British government was diverted to the war efforts. The Department of Rural Reconstruction was abolished and all the adult education centres withered away. In the absence of official support and assistance, local people failed to maintain these centres due to scarcity of materials like kerosene, books, furniture etc.

Number of factors responsible for this poor literacy:

1) The colonial government had no serious intention of spreading education among general masses, education programmes were mainly intended to create a class of people to work as office clerks, Muslim population showed disregard to the system of

education introduced by the British who usurped power from them; facilities for printing books, production of stationery and supply of teachers were also insufficient.

Literacy programmes undertaken during the Pakistan period was also far from adequate. The most remarkable work in this respect was done by Mr. H.G.S. Bever in the fifties. He was a retired officer of the Indian Civil Service. He wrote a booklet entitled "Education for all within six months". Later in collaboration with Mr. Abul-Hasnat Ismail and a few others, he set up an adult education Co-operative Society. Being inspired by him a number of devoted workers rallied round him and he emerged as a symbol of a movement. But the movement died down with his death in March, 1962.

The first serious national venture to fight illiteracy in the then East Pakistan was launched in 1954 under the village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID) Programme. Several adult education centres were established in the rural area under this programme. However, the programme was abandoned before it could make an appreciable impact on literacy situation. The

Bangladesh literacy

work of V-Aid was later taken up by Bangladesh Academy of Rural Development (BARD) established at Comilla in 1959. BARD, under the guidance of its director Mr. Akhtar Hameed Khan, designed an experimental project for selected areas of Comilla Kotwali Thana. The village Co-operatives were used as bases for promoting adult education.

The erstwhile government of East Pakistan, created a separate adult education section in the Education Directorate in 1963 and through it launched a modest pilot project on adult education in

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1964 initially covering four thanas in four districts. Later, another four thanas were brought under this programme bringing the total of number of thanas to eight in eight districts. These centres remained more or less active till the birth of Bangladesh in 1971.

After liberation of Bangladesh an unprecedented enthusiasm was created throughout the country. There was a wave of new movement for the removal of illiteracy and economic uplift of the country. The inherit-

ed pilot project continued to operate but did not expand beyond the pilot project. Because there was no realistic and comprehensive programme in this regard.

The major programme after liberation was "Mass Education Programme" launched on February, 21, 1980. Just nine years after the independence, the aim of the programme was to impart functional education to 40 million illiterate people aged 10 to 15 years.

This crash programme was planned for implementation under two phases. During Phase-I from January to June, 1980 about 10 million illiterate learners of the country were expected to be enrolled and each of them was to be provided with one primer free of cost.

Phase-II was scheduled to be launched during the 2nd Five Year Plan (1980-1985). This programme was thought to be the most comprehensive and methodological scheme on mass education, involving a total cost of Tk. 4,000 millions.

Besides, a number of NGO's were also engaged in this field. Of these Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Bangladesh Jatiyo Samabaya Union, Integrated Rural Development

Programme (IRDP), Jatiyo Mahila Sangstha, Jatiyo Tarun Sanga, Bangladesh Sakkharata Samity, Rajshahi Gano Mela-Project for Mass Education, Bangladesh Association for Community Education (BACE), Chittagong University Rural Development Project, Dhaka University Adult Education Centre and Shannirbar village deserve special mention.

But the target was never achieved. Propaganda more than real work was evident afterwards.

Here the role of UNESCO also deserves special mention. This international body through the Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO (BNCU) made significant contribution in the field of literacy in Bangladesh by providing the NGO's training materials and office equipments like duplicators, type-writers, audio-visual etc. The BNCU is also helping in various ways to give momentum to the literacy campaign.

NOTE

The second part of the article will be published tomorrow