

Aiding mass literacy

144

If someone enlightened enough is asked to pinpoint the core issue responsible for retarding progress in every sphere of our national existence, he would very probably regard lack of education, or mass illiteracy, as the main cause of it. Selective approaches to national problems, for instance, containing the population growth or increasing food production, are tied down for success in the last analysis to the spread of literacy since illiterate persons are ill prepared to grasp well the messages of family planning or tips on how to raise crop yields. Grappling the gamut of economic problems rests on whether the executors of these programmes, on a mass scale, would have the minimum level of education and know how. We cannot treat the economic problems we face in isolation, independent of factors like attainments in the field of literacy and education because successes or failures of economic activities undertaken seem to have that critical correlation with the permeation process of literacy and learning in the population.

Seen from this angle the present literacy drive, aiming to broaden the mental horizons of hitherto illiterate people, has been a pragmatic policy in operation. As more and more people learn to read and write, their newly acquired qualities definitely make them smarter and bridges that chasm between educated and uneducated persons' a phenomenon in our conditions which has chronically facilitated exploitation of the illiterate by a class of the unscrupulous educated. So, the spread effects of literacy should be the harbinger of a stabler and just social order.

Lately, the NEC has taken a decision which should add fresh stimulus to the literacy campaign. The new proposals call for a national service for mass education and incorporation of the compulsory services of all educated people — from matriculates upwards — into that programme. Apparently, the proposals could be no better. Due to obvious resource constraints, we would not bear so comfortably the upkeep of an entirely new pool of professional instructors raised to work for the mass education drive. Using of the compulsory services of all educated people, to stamp out illiteracy at the earliest, should be the better alternative, considering the sheer impact of the move and the entailed costs. On the merit side of such a service is also the fostering of a spirit to serve one's country selflessly. Once we gain that experience from the mass education service it should stand us in good stead for repetition subsequently in other spheres of national life.