

Adult education: its past and present

ANWARA FERDOUS

That 'education' is called the 'backbone of a nation' is a very old word. But it is a whole truth, in case of all nations and is applicable to all time. It is, however unfortunate for us that perhaps, we did not understand the importance of it. Whereas countries like Sri Lanka and Philippines are going to achieve cent per cent literacy we are still far from it. It will be more clear from the statistics of 1978 that our literacy rate is only 22.2. It was 21.5 in 1961 (the then East Pakistan). This shows rather a static figure meaning that there is no significant increase even after 17 years.

What are the reasons for this? Let's try to identify these reasons. First, majority of the people live at countryside, which comprises about 60 per cent of the total population, are suffering from poverty. There are many people in the town areas who have the same condition as well and have been struggling for existence. A piece of bread or a handful of rice is more important to them than having formal education. For this, they engage themselves to such kind of jobs where they can have immediate outcome for pulling an existence. Our education system can not provide them such immediate outcome. There is also un-

certainty of employment even for the educated ones. Secondly, if we think about the institutional facilities the statistical figure will just indicate that the current institutions i.e. primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, universities and all other institutions are not sufficient to accommodate the current number of students who are willing to be enrolled. Thirdly, the whole education system is itself a defective one. This existing system hinders in enhancement of literacy percentage. Moreover, it is not according to the need of our society and there is less scope for functional education. This system we actually inherited from the British period and is still continuing even after our independence.

However, the present Government has been planning to build up an effective education system in the country. This will be perhaps, implemented phase by phase and will take some years. But the priority at this stage should be on how increase literacy percentage in faster way with our limited resources? The Government has, initiated an adult education programme. The fundamental aim of this programme is to eradicate illiteracy from the country. By 1985, it is expected that 5 crores people

will be able to write and study. This target is alright but we should be cautious for the planning as well as implementation process. If the planning process is not clearly defined and if the implementation procedure is not rightly recognised then there is little hope in achieving the target mentioned.

This sort of campaign was also attempted previously. But all of them did not succeed and had to be left at half done stage. From past history it is learnt that Messrs. H. M. Ishaq and Nurun Nabi I.C.S.s had given much thought on rural reconstruction. Another I.C.S Mr. H.G.S Bivar also started the adult education centre in Dacca in 1956. It is believed that he was the pioneer in this field during the then East Pakistan. Later, during inception of Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V.A.I.D) programme, it was included as minor item which continued from 1955-56 to 1960-61. This was discontinued from July, 1961. It was not the end. The then government set up some commissions like the Education Reform Commission in the then East Pakistan which also opined for setting up adult education directorate. There were also a series of seminars and conferences held in different places. As

a outcome of these happenings there was a decision that there would be a pilot project on adult education and it would be implemented by the Education Directorate. So there was a adult education section under the same directorate in October, 1963 and started functioning from 1st January, 1964. Four Thanas i.e. Kotwali, Comilla, Gouripur (Mymensingh), Gaibanda (Rangpur) and Natore (Rajshahi) had been taken for this purpose and was attached to primary co-operative societies. Two approaches i.e. Extensive and intensive had been tried. In extensive approach adult education centres were organized in a scattered way and were far off from one another. The latter was a compact approach where all people of a certain area were included for complete eradication of illiteracy in a specific period. But this programme also did not continue for many reasons of which active people's participation and scarcity of funds can be mentioned. So these are lessons for us for our future plan. Its causes of failure or reasons for discontinuation may serve as guidelines in further planning on this aspect.

This time our Government has launched this programme with a larger dimension. At present

Government has created a cell on this line under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister. This has also linkage with the Education Department and district authority; different school and colleges have been entrusted with this job. Students have been asked to teach illiterate different communication media are also focusing this programme. Frequent evaluation of the progress of the scheme is necessary. Only with this we can re-adjust our plan and can push it on right direction.

Regarding people's participation; it can be said that if they are fit in some kind of economic activities where education will be also a side-by-side component then perhaps a larger participation is expected. We have to identify these economic activities which will be best suited for them. In this connection we can, of course, seek help from the union parishad chairmen, ward members, village extension agents, model farmers and managers of primary co-operative societies who are in true sense, involved in many activities at grass-root level. In a word,

we need practical thinking and should step forward cautiously. We have to increase literacy without wastage of money or energy as we have very limited resources.