

Literacy

What kind of thoughts come into our minds on the occasion of the World Literacy Day? A very large number of the new nations of Asia and Africa threw off their colonial yoke in the period after 1945. The mood for independence from domination in these new born countries was mainly from the feeling that freedom would achieve for them unfettered controls over their physical resources and policies to develop utmost their human resources potential as well. In this latter area—namely on mass literacy and relatively higher stages of education—the aspiration of so many newly emerging countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America was centered. The successes achieved by a number of countries in permeating literacy amongst their unlettered population has been considerable. For instance, in neighbouring Sri Lanka and in some territories of India like Madras and the North Eastern states, the literacy spread has been remarkable. The same can be attributed to several African countries. But on the overall, the world's literacy position has not improved to the extent desired. Globally, a handful of developing countries can be credited for significant advances in their literacy programmes compared to the rest. The other picture is uneven successes attained in literacy drive within the same country like one region having a greater number of literate people than in the other areas.

Bangladesh would be deserving a noticeable position in the developing world for the stress she has put on mass literacy in recent years. Eradication of illiteracy has been one major objective of national development activities started by Late President Ziaur Rahman. It goes as a tribute to his memory that the mass literacy drive has attained considerable results. In a year's time, millions of people in rural Bangladesh were enabled to read and write, people who for ages had remained sunk in total ignorance and bigotry. The mass literacy programme in Bangladesh looks beyond modest literacy spreading targets. Its aim is not only to familiarise illiterate population with the alphabets, but to actually help them utilise their new knowledge by being able to read the newspapers, write letters and calculate simple sums.

The sea of illiterate people in the developing countries presents a glaring case of the general inequalities characterising relationship between the developed and the developing world. International assistance into national literacy programmes of the type now conducted in Bangladesh can significantly help reduce this literacy gap.