

Literacy and Women

—Fatema Sultana

The transition from dark civilization to this modern, dynamic and scientific state was made possible by means of education or by the advancement of the society made by the literate people. Thus, through literacy a country, a nation gains paramount importance in the eyes of others.

It is the utilization of human skill, by pivoting his intelligence towards the improvement of human life made possible the eradication of various social, political economical problems which centres around the society.

It is the utmost desire and goal of every less developed countries to impart vocational technical in other words provide the opportunities for its illiterate inhabitants to receive education and raise its status. By virtue it is one of the most desirable objects of Bangladesh is to impart education and eradicate illiteracy from every corner of the country. It has chalked out various plans and policies to designate the proper implementation of its objective.

If we look at the country, we see that inspite of covering an area of 55,598 square miles it is one of the most densely populated country of the world with 89.7 million people living in such a small area. Inspte of the large number of population if we look at the figure below showing the percentage of the educated people, one would show a sign of wonder especially at the number of male and female educated persons.

BOTH SEXES	20.2 %
MALE	27.6 %
FEMALE	12.2 %
URBAN	
BOTH SEXES	37.7 %
MALE	45.3 %
FEMALE	27.9 %
RURAL	
BOTH SEXES	18.5 %
MALE	25.7 %
FEMALE	10.9 %

Source: 1974 Bangladesh Population Census Report, National Volume.

The table clearly shows that inspite of the 89.7 million people the 1974 census shows that only 20.2% of the people are literate. Obviously the 1981 census taken, would show a higher per cent increase. Only 12.2% of the female population is literate.

This small percentage is negligible if we compare the statistics of women literacy in the other developed countries. Also if we compare with the following South Asian countries we get the following results.

Percentage Distribution of Literates (15 years & above) of the South Asian Countries including Bangladesh by Sex and Urban-Rural Break-down.

Country	Census Date	All areas			Total
		Total	Male	Female	
Bangladesh	1-3-1974	25.8	37.1	13.2	48.1
Indonesia	24-9-1971	59.6	70.8	49.0	79.1
Malaysia	24-25-8-1970	58.0	69.1	46.8	68.0
Philippines	6-5-1970	83.4	84.4	82.2	92.8
Thailand	1-4-1970	78.6	87.2	70.3	87.7

Sources: U.N. Demographic Year Book, 1973-1974 Bangladesh Census Data.

M : Male

F : Female

Among these Asian countries, it shows that female education is less widespread in Bangladesh.

A question is bound to arise what is the reason for this less participation of women folk in Bangladesh than other Asian and developed countries

of the world?

If we analyse the social background of our country, we can say that because of our society's structure and the narrow outlook of the people it was not possible for the women folk to break the traditional barrier and join the sway of female educational revolution which penetrated into other countries of the world. It is therefore one of the reasons for the delayed participation of our women-folk to join the literacy campaign. Apart from the narrow outlook because of the "veil-system", especially in the rural side it was virtually impossible for them to join the call of reading and writing. For this reason the number of educated rural women-folk is low in comparison to the urban sector. This was even low in the 1961 census where rural literate population was only 7% and urban sector was 24.8%.

It was also because of the women-folk depended upon their husbands which also hampered them to receive any education. As a result in the 1974 census we see percentage of female population receiving complete education. The 1974 Census in line with international usage defines literacy as the ability to read and write in any language.

In this table, one notices that 93% of the females in the age group "35 & over" have not completed a single year of formal education. The percentages of persons with "0 completed year of education" for the age group 15-19 years drops to 74.7% for females. But a greater portion of people female attain secondary levels of education (6-10 completed years) in this age group (15-19) as compared to the age group "35 years and above". The percentage of females in urban areas going for higher studies is increasing and in the latest census taken would increase. In the table we see that women in the age group 20-24 have completed "13 or more" years of schooling compared to only 0.4% of the age group "35 years and over".

From this table one would see the discrepancy between the urban and rural female educated percentage. It is seen that female population in the rural areas, the participation rate is less.

The women-folk mainly in the rural areas works most of their spare time doing petty jobs. During the harvest season they are busy and similarly they also work in the cottage industries. It is done out of necessity for existence. In return they are paid in cash or kind and this helps to some extent to keep the family from the grip of starvation. Hence,



Making an effort to understand the mystery of light and darkness.

poverty binds them from the to the join the campaign of gaining knowledge.

But as we know that women constitute about half the country's total population. If this vast majority of the women section remain ignorant then it is difficult to train this portion of the population into skilled labourers, when the country is trying to develop its industrial and agricultural sectors. This in turn retards the socio-economic development as the fact that has been accepted by many now-a-days. The reason that training of them is difficult is that they are ignorant of many facts.

Hence it is of utmost importance to impart education to this section of the population so that in gradual years our women folk can become productive agents in various fields of activities, as the women of the developed countries are.

The obstacles which has been stated earlier, cannot be overcome in a single night but by gradual persuasion of the policies and plans adopted by the government. These policies include that primary education be made compulsory and universal during the Second Five Year Plan.

If the socio-economic characteristic nature of society presence of poverty, lack of inspiration disapproval towards co-education and other causes prevailing especially in the rural areas then compulsory and universal primary educational programme will not attain its peak of success. These factors have to be seen first.

In the urban area the participation of female in the educational sector has risen in comparison to the rural sector. More are joining the literacy programme and are helping others to overcome the obstacles prevalent. They are helping in making the literacy programme successful in all possible ways like school students and college students

Country	Census Date	All areas			Urban	Rural		
		Total	Male	Female		Total	M	F
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Indonesia	24-9-1971	59.6	70.8	49.0	79.1	88.5	69.8	55.8
Malaysia	24-25-8-1970	58.0	69.1	46.8	68.0	78.3	57.7	54.0
Philippines	6-5-1970	83.4	84.4	82.2	92.8	94.0	91.8	78.7
Thailand	1-4-1970	78.6	87.2	70.3	87.7	93.7	81.9	77.1
						86.1	86.1	68.3

desire to read and write. The inspiration to gain knowledge lassens down.

In a country where the reign of poverty is predominant it is given priority to the fact that boys are more productive than girls. Therefore it is necessary to impart education to boys than to girls.

In many cases co-education is opposed by the parents and also because of the narrow outlook of our society.

These are some of the causes which drew a barrier of girls

should teach the ignorant ones. Thus, if the rural and urban women-folk participate towards the eradication of illiteracy then the literate number of women-folk will soon rise. They will soon be helping in the various sectors of economic development as the women of other developed countries have done and still doing. As a result if the programme is fruitful, in gradual course of time the nation will gradually boost up and also the standard of living condition will improve.