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Suggestions

8/4/89 Mass Education Programme

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WITH the alarming increase of population in the world, especially in the third world countries, life has become very competitive. And with the advancement of science and technology life has become very complex too. Economically there has undergone a radical change in life pattern at all levels. So to cope with the changed circumstances education has become part and parcel of life. So is the stress upon formal and non-formal education. In countries like ours having very poor percentage of literacy, governments are trying to increase the literacy rates by launching programmes every now and then.

Strategies: For the implementation of these programmes planners indicate different strategies determined by the socio-economic geographic, ethnic and racial factors of the people constituting the population, whom the programme is to be operated upon. Sometime the administrative advantage is counted upon and somewhere the income generating activities of the working NGOs in the country are tried upon. Some organisations also come forward with their missionary zeal to remove the social ill of illiteracy. In Bangladesh the administrative advantage coupled with income generating activities of the NGOs is employed for the successful implementation of the programme at the moment.

Everywhere the illiterate people do have the following traits to draw the attention of the planners:

Mostly the illiterate are poor and they are religious minded; they are conservative; they obey leadership; they are interested to employ their

time in any income generating activity and want direct benefit from it; mostly they are day labourers; they cannot foresee their future.

The first three traits are the determinant factors favourable for the implementation of MEP programme while the later three keep them aloof from joining the programme. In most cases programming does not receive proper attention for employing the favourable traits in the work and hence is the unsatisfactory result.

Situation in Muslim countries: On education Islam has laid much emphasis. Even in the case of revelation of the Holy Quran we see that Creator enjoins: "Read and your Lord is the most Bounteous. Who taught by pen and taught men which He knew not". So it is binding upon the Muslims to acquire newer knowledge by reading. Though the Muslims are illiterate in the highest number nowadays, the teachings of the Quran are not lost.

Among the Muslims religious education is compulsory at least up to a certain level. It just begins in the prime of a man's life in a moktab, a socially recognised institution financed by charity and organised by the members of the society from time immemorial. But it has no state patronisation though every body attends this moktab once in life to learn functional religion. One can find out millions of people without attending a primary school but it is almost impossible to find out a single man without attending this moktab once in his childhood.

Since prayer is considered to be the holiest institution in Islam and is compulsory for man and woman above ten, everybody becomes mentally ready to send his son, daughter or ward to moktab when he/she attains the age of six or seven and the reverse is socially rebuked bitterly. Even during the marriage negotiation of boys and girls the religious education counts much. In other words, attendance in a moktab has social binding and social commitment as well.

The moktab in a village is generally run by an Imam or by a muazzin of a mosque, who again is the intellectual leader of the people living in the society called Samaj. He plays a very important role during the following occasions: He leads prayers five times daily; he looks after the development and management of the Mosque; he leads milad mahfil on any occasion; he interpretes the tenets or shariah of Islam regarding day-to-day affairs of muslims; he leads the marriage ceremony, and so on.

So the role of an Imam or a molla can be easily understood from the functions he performs in the social life. His influence upon the society should be utilised for the betterment of the society by reorganising his services scientifically and raising his capabilities through simple training.

Fundamentally a campaign for literacy is an act of social reformation which needs a group of workers devoted to the cause and which cannot

be operated upon only by remunerative services. From this point of view, the Imams or the molla's are the most suitable persons in our society for a reformatory work. They have the following characteristics suited for the purpose:

In relation to the society the mollas or the imams are permanent and are not mobile for opportunity; they stand beside a man during his extreme frustration; everybody is to get his services during the last moment of his life; he is the most seen man; everybody recognises him as an honest man in our society; a man of any age does not feel ashamed of learning any thing from him and so on.

In the purview of what has been said, for an effective perpetual campaign of literacy programme in Bangladesh we are to consider the following points:

— Bangladesh has 85% Muslim population.

— There are more than two lacs mosques in Bangladesh and all mosques do have maktabs with a teacher.

— All the villages in Bangladesh are distinctly and conventionally divided into a society popularly called a samaj to be under the guidance of a molla or an imam who in most cases again happens to be the teacher of a moktab.

— The common people are religion abiding and as such obedient to the religious leaders.

— Considering his position, qualities, relation with the people of the samaj and the role he plays over the samaj an imam or a molla who works in a moktab may be entrusted with the important task of implementing the literacy programme.