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Illiterate Adults

From time to time efforts to eradicate adult illiteracy have been taken up with minimal success. Of the population over the age of fifteen years about 47 million are illiterate and by the end of the century illiterate adults are expected to number at least 62 million which as a percentage of the population if accepted to be the estimated 142 million is almost 44%. As a large proportion of the population are children possibly only around 10% of the adult population will be literate at the end of the century!

Such statistics overwhelm and tend to swamp us for up to now we have not been able to find a viable solution to the problem of adult illiteracy. During the Third Five Year Plan an elaborate programme of mass education for adults was taken up at the beginning of the period only to be abandoned when it was found that targets were not being attained. The question then arises whether or not adult education can be at all effective given the poor learning ability of the People.

The problem seemingly goes back to the fact of our people's nutritional status which impinges on their ability to retain and learn. Past shortages in food have created conditions which cannot be remedied now. This is the sad fact with which we are faced; For, like it or not we have, by and large, a people incapable of learning new things for no fault of their own. Barring a miracle, this is one difficulty virtually impossible to overcome and one which threatens to engulf us. In 1951 out of a total population of 44 million, 30 million were illiterate; by 1981, the year of the last census, approximately 56 million of the total population of 90 million were illiterate. How many were illiterate adults can only be guessed; but they appear to be about equal to the Child population and in addition illiteracy, like poverty, is passed down the generations.

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