

The Eradication Of Illiteracy - III

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CONTINUING/Non-Formal

Education systems are necessary.

if levels of literacy gained, whether

from Adult Functional Literacy clas-

ses or from formal or non-formal

Primary Education, are to be main-

tained and further developed. But as

with Non-Formal Primary Educa-

tion, the even stronger case for the

thorough development of NFE for all

levels of needs is that the provision of

Western-style formal education for

all, behind which this sub-continent

has been trailing for nearly a century,

is way beyond the foreseeable

budgetary capacity of Bangladesh

and even the likely limits of interna-

tional aid. A self-respecting country

has to aim to provide all education

from its Revenue budget.

NFE systems, though non-formal,

still have to be organised and prom-

oted. There is a great deal to be

learned from Thailand's very exten-

sive NFE Development programmes

organised within the Ministry of

Education's Adult Education Divi-

sion. With extensive community par-

ticipation, NFE has become an official

channel of education, with

accepted equivalencies with the for-

mal sector.

Publications pivoted on a self-

instruction concept will be required

in three main categories:

Academic: They will need to fulfil

the needs of poor students who

cannot afford to attend secondary

schools or colleges. Open University

materials need to be produced. The

world of academic study must be

opened up for anyone to enter.

Standards will be monitored and

recognised by the formal sector.

When parity is achieved, then mutual

development can be planned.

Economic And Industrial: Materi-

als will supply existing needs and

also promote education in areas re-

quired by new technology and pro-

grammes for the development of small

and cottage industries. BSCIC and

other organisations will liaise closely

with the NFE publications body.

Cultural And General: Besides

introduction to national and world

literature, appropriately reproduced

with commentaries, and other read-

ing-matter for pleasure or widening

knowledge, new writing which cap-

tures local stories and folk-lore, will

come in this category, and, given

encouragement, one in a hundred

new adult literates may be expected

to write material which can be con-

sidered for publication. Such writing

would in turn add impetus to the

literacy movement, no doubt with

some cultural surprises.

The CoBLACE and LEMA

programmes include provision for the production of 100 and 275 new NFE publications respectively.

Publications will not be sufficient without systems and study promotion programmes. People's Academies or Gonokendra, utilising existing public buildings when vacant, could become centres of spontaneous cultural expression and the recording of oral

traditions. The liberation of the illiterate masses now gaining their long-concealed heritage will mostly however be celebrated in Readers Circles, Writers Clubs, Savings Groups, Skills Cooperatives, and so on, and libraries in every village should become a focus for new economic, social and cultural advancement.

Open University and "Open HSC" and career courses can be tutored using Distance Education and links with radio and TV, as in Thailand. The Centres would also prove power-houses for an Education Reform Movement (ERM). A healthy breeze bringing a renaissance of culture, respect for and cooperation in the role of law, and an exciting new era in education, may not prove to be too fanciful an expectation.

(e) Education reform, Movement.

The goal of an ERM is in fact the

fulfilment of the stated policies of

successive Governments, so it may

seem strange that a Movement should be necessary. Ideally the main hope must continue to lie in corrective action through the statutory procedures. But there are constraints which make this difficult:

(i) Once the condition of PE has been allowed to sink so low, the dishonour into which education has

fallen, and the attitudes which have now permeated the whole system, make it almost impossible for education to 'pull itself up by its own bootstraps'. The fact is that corruption has been tolerated and so

'taught' to society and to children

from their earliest years—it is not

just something passively accepted. In

earlier days, education was given a

prestige by teachers. But now there

are some teachers who normally

steal time and show dishonour to

their own profession. If corruption is

to be removed from society the vital

area where reform must begin is

education. But it is from here today

in Bangladesh that it is spreading. To

reform from within will take massive

determined effort by charismatic

moral leaders.

(ii) Public protest and pressure to

reform will not easily come from the ranks of those who have benefited from the elite system, and without the backing of the powerful it is not to be expected that change will take place through normal procedures. Those who have the power haven't the will; those who have the will haven't the power.

(iii) There is a natural fear of and

resistance to the unfamiliar, even

though countries like Thailand have

proved how non-formal education

can be effectively introduced over a

short period of time. After about two

decades of steady deterioration in

PE, even reverting to the standards of

1973 looks like a new idea.

Moreover, in the last 30-40 years

immense changes have taken place in

the world to which education has to

adapt. These are new trends, not

always understood by administra-

tors.

(iv) For education reform, re-

planning for the life-opportunities of

20 million children and 60 million

adults stands out as the first and most

urgent challenge. But macro-

planning is a rare skill in Bangladesh.

and where it is found it tends to be

snapped up by industries offering

higher salaries than Government can

afford.

(v) Whoever are required to do or

approve the re-planning, their own

experience will have been only of

institutional education, and it is diffi-

cult to imagine non-institutional

forms which would be equally

acceptable. So not only planning

capacity but also leaps of imagination

and faith are required to implement a

reformed formal system and a para-

llel alternative.

It is not just a leap by planners and

administrators, but a national leap

that has to be taken. Only a popular

movement could move sufficient

numbers of people. Nations take

leaps forward from time to time,

cutting their links with the past either

by Acts of Parliament, or Constitu-

tional Amendments, or else by re-

volutionary demands enforced by

the people. But educational patterns

tend to be the last to be changed, as

they form a strong bridge between

past and present. For that reason,

only the most radical reformers have

set out to change them. Consequent-

ly, would-be reformers of education

are viewed with suspicion and have a

especially hard task.

The education system of Bang-

ladesh, with those of India, Pakistan,

Sri Lanka and Burma is the linear

descendant of that of the colonial

system which had the ulterior motive

of facilitating external administrative

control. It deliberately operated

selectively, ignoring rayots and

labourers, and reinforced classism.

Largely through the impact of this

inherited system modern Bangladesh

has discrimination and classism

where theologically and democratic-

ally there should be none. The

chances of effective, peaceful reform

depend mainly on linking together

the majority—those men and women

who want a non-discriminatory and

creative style of modern education—

in a determined movement to bring

about the changes that will allow

education not just to teach the equal-

ity of people but also to demonstrate

it. Otherwise, hypocrisy rules, sup-

ported by condoned corruption and