

Literacy And Development

Abul Quasem

LITERACY is the first step towards functional education which, in turn, is a condition precedent for establishment of a developed and egalitarian society. In our country about 65 p.c. of the population or about 8 crore people are illiterate. To remove illiteracy from such a massive population and to impart functional education and vocational training to them is a challenging task. Not only total social commitment but also effective mobilization of huge resources over a long period of time at national level would be necessary to achieve this objective. Needless to say, this objective is worth achieving even at a big cost as it is the only way to build up a welfare and prosperous society.

Removal of illiteracy totally and imparting of functional education to the whole population would perhaps require a macro approach i.e., a total war. These activities can neither be viewed scientifically nor undertaken effectively in isolation because of our socio-economic under-development. For achieving this objective, social mobilization marshalling of huge resources by all sectors of the economy, building up of an appropriate institutional frame-work and linking literacy and functional education drive with productive activities as well as synthesising the total development effort with the drive would be necessary.

Since the segment of the population to which the literacy movement would be directed is pre-occupied and busy with the effort for earning their living, they have very little time to spare for acquiring literacy. Therefore, essentially their enthusiasm for mastering literacy would be at a very low key. If, therefore, the literacy drive could be linked with their normal productive activities and if literacy would lead them to functional education and vocational training in order to increase their productivity they would be aroused and motivated to participate meaningfully in the effort. The marriage of the literacy drive and functional education with productive activities is not very difficult to arrange. What is needed is composition of books by subject matter specialists and imparting functional education

by the experts in their respective field. Needless to say these books would be composed on the basis of the latest scientific knowledge and practical method of production in a lucid and rhythmic style.

The crucial problem is that the whole effort is to be institutionalised. If a proper institutional frame-work could be developed linking literacy, functional education/vocational training, productive activities and co-operation, the literacy and functional education endeavour would not only be effective but would also create necessary dynamism for development of the national economy.

In fact, to make the literacy drive sustainable and, at the same time, to infuse the required speed into it through the national developmental effort, the drive for village literacy and functional education should be made the focal point round which other super structures like village co-operatives for developmental activities etc. may be built up to create an appropriate thrust for socio-economic uplift. Perhaps only through this matrix the literacy-functional education drive and national development effort would be institutionalised and made a self-propelling process for a total success.

This institutional frame-work may be extended slowly but steadily to all the eightysix thousand villages of the country. If this could be done in a planned manner, in the foreseeable future the ideal of a literate, prosperous and egalitarian society could be achieved at a fairly good speed.

Mention may be made here of total eradication of illiteracy in the district of Lalmonirhat and Bhola town through, mainly, voluntary effort. The next step in these areas should be directed towards functional education and vocational training. And this model should be followed for the whole of Bangladesh to make it a self-reliant country.

The public places like Clubs, School, Union Parishads, Medical Centres, Community Centres, religious places etc. are numerous all over Bangladesh. The mass education centre can easily be organised in these public places. For this, the cost

involved in housing and furnishing would not be much. These centres would also function as the nerve centre of the co-operatives which would be so designed as to pioneer all the productive activities of the village. In fact, there would be a fusion of mass functional education with Co-operative and Co-operative would be the most essential associate of mass education. If mass education and co-operative can gain strength from the same centre and move forward together they would support and nourish each other. As Co-operatives in isolation is yet to succeed in Bangladesh so it seems that mass education may meet the same fate if planned separately, because mass education and co-operatives are both supplementary and complementary to each other. And developmental and productive activities should be their sheet anchor for survival. None of them would survive if productive effort is not made their motive force. As mass functional education without co-operatives is difficult to conceive of, so co-operative without mass education may not bear any fruit. And both of them would move forward through productive effort. If these are based on developmental activities then every one would be inspired to participate intensively in these activities and make a success of them. Once they succeed poverty would go away (from Bangladesh) and the country may become a real "Bengal of gold."

The structure of the mass education centre would be in accordance with the need of the learner. Those who are illiterate would form one class. Their contents of syllabus would be how to read, write and do the sum. All people, young and old, men or women who are illiterate would be in this class. When they cross this class successfully they would be sent up to the next higher class. Those who slip out from school, madrasa, would constitute another class. Their syllabus would include scientific education on co-operatives, family planning, agriculture, cottage and small industry, food-processing, preservation of surplus products, marketing, environment and tree plantation, health and

sanitation, i.e. all subjects encompassing possible developmental and productive activities in rural Bangladesh. All methods of education e.g. audiovisual, learning by doing, lecturing etc. would be used to impart education on these subjects.

The composition of topics for the initial class is easy. The experts on children's topics would do the needful for this class. The composition of topics for the other classes is not also very difficult. There is no dearth of experts for composition of topics on these subjects. For example, we are not poor in experts on co-operative and family planning, agriculture, poultry, livestock, pisciculture etc. stationed mostly in Thana HQs. Besides, the college and University have been producing these experts and scientists and they are also being trained abroad continuously. Therefore, they would be able to compose topics with skill for this class. The real problem is, therefore, to plan mass education pragmatically and manage efficiently for its full implementation.

Three types of people, namely the literate people living in the village, the students of school, madrasa, college and University (during vacation) and the students of the higher classes of the centre can be the teachers of the initial class of the centre. The scientists and experts generally stationed at Thana, District HQs. can be the teacher trainers of the higher classes. As most of these scientists and experts are govt. officers they may be deployed easily for the purpose. To prove to be an efficient officer, public servants of the higher category should also be a trainer for lower categories in their respective fields of activity. The public servant who fail to play the role of a trainer in his own sphere cannot contribute much to national uplift.

For scientific mass education there is need for scientific planning and management. All the same, in the context of the condition prevailing in our country, the less the governmental control the better. This is why utmost emphasis needs to be laid on the rise of local leadership to shoulder this great national responsibility of functional mass education.