

RURAL FUNCTIONAL LITERACY PROJECTS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

INTRODUCTION

A major thrust to India's rural functional literacy programme was given in 1977 when the National Adult Education Programme was launched, to begin on a nation-wide basis in 1978. A field study of one of these programmes in the Chatroo Blocks in Jammu and Kashmir was undertaken.

Chatroo Block in Jammu and Kashmir is situated in extremely difficult terrain; the centres having been located in rugged, inaccessible and backward areas of the district. This has affected the efficiency of the supervision of adult education centres. The topography of the area is such that the centres remain cut off from the outside world during the long winter months due to heavy snow and lack of communication links. Another peculiar characteristic of the area is that the majority (60 per cent) of the population of the district move to highland pastures with their cattle and livestock or go out of the districts to work as labourers with the forest contractors for some five or six months each year. In the case of the former, the population is scattered, thus making it difficult for learners to assemble at a particular point. The migratory character of the population affects the continuity of the learning programme.

A characteristic feature of the people, particularly the women, is that from a very young age they show a natural talent for handwork and handicrafts. Therefore handicrafts form part of the adult education centre activities, particularly at the female centres.

Bilingualism is another characteristic of the area of study. Some centres use only Hindi, others use Urdu, while there are some that offer courses in both Hindi and Urdu. This bilingualism also has its effect on the learning process.

The Rural Functional Literacy Project in the Kishtwar-Chatroo Blocks will have to be appreciated in the context of its population characteristics, topography and difficulties of terrain. All these factors have a direct or indirect bearing on the implementation of the project.

PROFILE OF THE CENTRES

The problems arising out of the peculiar conditions and characteristics of the learner population and of the topography will be discussed later. Before that, we shall go round the adult education centres visited by the study-team.

1. Brahman Mohalla

Smt. Sushila Kumare, a middle-aged instructor at Brahman Mohalla, the women's centre, is a matriculate. She was trained in tailoring at the Industrial Training Institute. She has been running the centre on the verandah of her house since September 1979. She is otherwise unemployed and the honorarium drawn by her as instructor is her only source of income. At the beginning of the course, she had 25 learners enrolled, but at present there are only

eighteen as seven dropped out - four due to marriage, while the other three joined the handicrafts centre run by the State Handicrafts Department.

The learning material provided for the learners includes the primer *Jaan Pahchan*, in Hindi, which is basically meant for children and adopts the primary school methods of learning from alphabets to the construction of words and sentences. The attainments in the literacy and numeracy skills at the centre are fairly satisfactory as the learners can read competently, write short simple sentences, count up to 1000 and do addition and subtraction up to three digits. The learners at this centre also get training in needlework and cutting and stitching of clothes. However they want a sewing machine. The instructor felt that if this was provided, it would attract a greatly increased enrolment. Enquiries from the instructor and learners revealed that no outside agency was helping them to supplement their efforts. Excepting one visit by the block medical lady officer to this centre during the nine months' duration of the course, no other block or village level functionary from any other development department or agency has visited this centre.

As most of the learners in this centre come from households owning land, the womenfolk have some knowledge of different types of agricultural inputs and methods, but their knowledge is not sufficient. They all want officials from the Agriculture or Extension Departments to visit them and instruct them. This would greatly help them to help their menfolk in their fields. Similarly the learners are eager to have knowledge about health and hygiene and proper care of their children and, for this purpose, need the help of the agencies concerned to supplement their knowledge.

2. Hirayal

Miss Santosh Kumari, a young girl in Hirayal area is a matriculate and has an ITI training diploma in cutting and tailoring. She also runs the female centre in her own house. She is otherwise unemployed and the honorarium drawn by her as instructor is her only source of income. The learners in this centre have the additional advantage of the tailoring machine, which is provided by the instructor for use by the learners at the centre. The instructor is a very active and enthusiastic worker and seemed to take an interest not for the sake of remuneration but for the love of her work. Several samples of work on paper and cloth were shown to the visiting team along with samples of stitched clothes. Apart from tailoring, the learners' group at this centre has also made certain handicrafts including *Chakkla-Phoori* or *Binaa* (seats made of straw and other locally available floral materials). The attendance at this centre in the register is 21 but the actual attendance, according to the instructors' report, is usually fifteen to sixteen on any day. The centre has run for eight months, having started in October 1979. Four of the learners use the Urdu primer *Jaan Pahchan* while the remaining learners use the Hindi primer. This is a bilingual centre - some learning through the Hindi medium and others through the Urdu medium. While the instructor is conversant in Hindi, she was handicapped by not being fluent in Urdu. However, she is trying to learn Urdu in order to be able to teach in it. While the four students learning in Urdu are handicapped, the literacy and numeracy levels of those learning in Hindi is fairly satisfactory.

3. Berabata

Smt. Nirmala Devi, like Santosh Kumari, is a matriculate and ITI trained in calico printing. She runs the female centre in her own house in Berabata. She has also made available to the learners her own sewing machine for tailoring work. She has also put her training in ITI to use by instructing the learners in making handicraft bags and in making *gabbas* (a thick embroidered cloth for table or floor use). The centre has run for six months and has an enrolment of 20 including a couple of elderly women about 60-65

years old. The level of literary at this centre is not as satisfactory as in the other two centres. The learners can write only up to 100 and can do additions only up to two digits. They can all write their own names and short sentences of not more than three or four very simple words. As in the other two centres visited, the instructor and the learners have had no support from any other development department or agency. However, the young instructress does her best to teach literacy and vocational skills. Both instructor and learners expressed their wish to see people from development departments such as Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Health. The two elderly women attending the centre are taken daily to the centre. They said that they are free from all liabilities and enjoy coming to the centre and learning both literacy and functional skills.

4. *Bigana*

Miss Pamila Devi, a young matriculate girl with one year practical training at the handicrafts centre, runs the female centre at Bigana and helps the learners not only in improving literacy skills but also in teaching them handicrafts, particularly the *gabba* work, and in making cloth bags. The centre has been functioning with a regular attendance of students since January 1980. The learners have acquired literacy in reading and writing of alphabets and the construction of short words of two or three letters, and can write up to 50. The progress in literacy, when related to the period the centre has been running, is not up to the desired level. However, the group as a whole, shows a keen interest in improving their functional skills in making handicraft articles, and reveals better social awareness than in some other centres visited. Interestingly, the young learners seem conscious of improving their living standards through planned parenthood, although our interviews with the male learners at the male centres did not discern interest in small family norms.

5. *Panditgaon*

Smt. Vijayalakshmi, a young 1979 matriculate with training in needlework, knitting and embroidery, has been running the female centre at Panditgaon since April 1980. The centre has an enrolment of 20 female learners but usually the attendance does not exceed fifteen or sixteen. As in other centres, the learners are keenly interested in handicrafts and carry on these activities along with literacy and numeracy. At this centre, the learners can count to 50, while their reading and writing skills are quite satisfactory.

6. *Bandarra*

Bandarra has a female centre run by the Handicrafts Department in collaboration with the Education Department. The centre has 25 female trainees out of which 21 are illiterate. The age group of the trainees is fourteen to eighteen years. Each trainee gets a stipend of Rs.60 per month from the Handicrafts Department, out of which Rs.30 is paid in cash every month and the remaining Rs.30 is deposited in an account in the name of the trainee. The only conditions for admission to this centre are that the trainee should be in the age group fourteen to eighteen and should sign an agreement to attend for one full year and then join a workers' cooperative society for the manufacture and marketing of handicraft materials. The amount deposited in each trainee's personal account is pooled at the end of the year and this amount, which is about Rs.800 for a group of 25 trainees, is used as the initial investment by the cooperative society for the purchase of raw materials.

Sales are effected by the Association of Cooperative Societies who in turn sell the goods to State Emporia and other outlets. The Cooperatives' Association sometimes gives advances in the form of cloth or other raw materials to the cooperative societies for special orders.

The daily training period at the centre is from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. During this period one and a half hours is set aside for literacy training for the illiterate trainees. The assistant craft mistress is employed at the centre at a salary of Rs.650 per month. She also acts as the literacy instructor, for which she gets an additional honorarium of Rs.50 from the Education Department. The learning materials for the trainees are provided by the Education Department. The learners use, as at other centres, the primer, *Jaan Pahchan* in both Hindi and Urdu. The instructor is not fluent in Hindi but gets help from one of the four Hindi-speaking trainees. The literacy attainments at this centre are the best of all the centres visited. The centre has been functioning for the last three or four months and learners can read short simple sentences at the desired speed. They can count up to 100 and calculate additions and subtractions up to two digits. Their writing skills are also superior to those of the learners at the other centres which the team visited. On the whole, the learners showed as much interest and enthusiasm in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills as in handicraft training. In short, this centre run jointly by the Handicrafts and Education Departments is a welcome innovation in the field of adult education. The homogeneity of the group and its long-term association in a joint economic activity through the cooperative, contribute to the rapid rate of progress in both vocational training and literacy skills.

7. Seva

Seva is a male centre run by Mohd. Shahan who is a non-matriculate. This centre has an enrolment of 27 adults, although usually the daily attendance is of the order of fifteen to twenty adults. In the same building the instructor also runs a non-formal part-time education centre for nineteen children of six to fourteen years of age. The instructor gets a remuneration of Rs.100 per month, for both these activities.

By and large, the learners at this centre are older than 35. Those who are younger tend to have jobs with the Public Works Department. Others are engaged in silk making. Occasionally, the centre is visited by technical extension workers who help to improve their silk worms. The departmental officers also visit the centre when produce is ready for sale.

The literacy attainments at this centre are below standard. Only a few learners can count up to 100 and most are unable to do simple additions or subtractions. Writing skills are below the desired level. They have, however, been taught to read and write their names. The group members are aware of their lack of early education and the consequent handicaps they suffer. They are conscious that their village, with a population of about 150, is neglected because access to it is so difficult. They are also conscious that they have been exploited by money lenders who charge exorbitant interest on loans. They all seem eager to improve their functional skills in the occupations in which they are engaged.

8. Chingam

This is an exclusively Harijan centre run by a Harijan instructor, Shri Prem Nath, who is a non-matriculate and is by occupation a labourer. He finds time for running the centre as he is perhaps the only person available in the village who is educated up to 8th standard. Most of the learners in this group are employed as labourers in road construction and repair work. However, some of them are also small farmers.

The centre has been functioning since April 1980 and teaches in Urdu. Standards are poor for various reasons including the fact that the centre has not been visited by any field level functionary of any development department or agency, except once by a block development officer, whose visit, according to the students, was a very useful and encouraging experience.

As with Seva, the people of Chingam suffer exploitation by money lenders and shopkeepers. They hope that their education at the centre will be able to save them eventually from exploitation.

Our journey around the adult education centres has been a revealing experience in several ways.

LITERACY ATTAINMENTS

While the literacy and numeracy attainments at the female centres has been, by and large, satisfactory, the same has not been so at the male centres. The learners in the female centres mostly belong to the age group of 15-35, with the exception of a few elderly women observed in a couple of centres. The male learners' groups consisted mainly of learners in the 35-50 age group, with a few in the 15-35 age group. A better rate of progress at the female centres as compared to male centres may be partly due to the relative youth of the women.

The literacy attainment at the female centre in Bandarra run by the Handicrafts Department in collaboration with the Education Department was better than in all other centres visited. The learners at this centre have formed themselves into an active group from the very beginning. They retain their association even after the completion of the craft training and learning courses at the centre. They showed as much enthusiasm in acquiring literacy and numeracy skills as in the craft training. The rapid rate of progress at the centre could be attributed to the economic motivation that is in-built into this group, as well as its homogeneity in terms of age and commitment to the workers' cooperative for the manufacture and marketing of their produce for a period of at least three years.

FUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By and large, the learners at both the male and female centres are cultivators and have lands of their own, though they can be categorised as only small and marginal farmers. Quite a number of them also keep cattle or other livestock to supplement their income. Again, the majority of them, particularly the women learners, are engaged in some handicraft to supplement the family income. The female learners at the adult education centres have no doubt been helped in the upgrading of their functional skills in craft work, as the instructors engaged at most of the female centres have had their earlier training in crafts or other vocational skills at the Industrial Training Institute or at the crafts centres. However, the learners have not derived much benefit in upgrading of their professional skills in their main occupations, i.e. farming or animal husbandry. This is partly due to the fact that the visits of the field-level functionaries of the Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Departments to the centres have been few and far between. Except for one male centre visited once by a block lady medical officer, all the centres visited have been neglected in so far as the programme envisaged the functional development of learners through the help of field-level staff of development departments and agencies functioning at the village, block and district levels.

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Mainly because of the lack of interest by the development departments and agencies in the field, the general level of social awareness among the learners has not shown much improvement. However, interestingly, consciousness among the female learners about improving their standard of living and

health through planned families seemed higher than among male learners. The male learners interviewed still seemed to believe in large families as this gave them more family hands to earn. Again, the female learners showed keen interest in learning agricultural methods and inputs, as they did in the improvement of health in their families and their livestock. They would welcome visits by experts to the centres who could help them in improving their family health and living standards or in raising their professional competence. There was a positive response from the learners at all the centres to the idea of having a daily newspaper at the centre to help raise their level of general awareness. All of them readily agreed to make a contribution of 40-50 paise a month towards the cost of a newspaper. In the beginning, the instructor would read aloud the important news from the paper. This would eventually help the learners to get into the habit of reading newspapers by themselves.

TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS

Some of the weaknesses observed in the teaching-learning process at the adult education centres visited by the team are as follows:

1. The physical environment leaves much to be desired. Except for the blackboard, the centres did not display any other materials such as wallcharts, posters, publications, etc. to make the environment lively and attractive. Besides, at some centres, even the primers and slates were in short supply; nor were there any workbooks for the learners.
2. The primer used at the centres, namely *Jaan Pahchan* in Hindi and Urdu, is suitable for children at the primary school level but not for adults. The discussions at the State level revealed that the primer, specially brought out for adult learners, entitled *Behtar Zindagi* (Better Life), separately for male and female learners, had already been published but was awaiting formal ceremonial release by the State Chief Minister. There has been a delay in the preparation and publication of the primer suitable for adults. It is hoped that soon this weakness in the programme will be overcome.
3. The teaching-learning process has followed the traditional primary school method of beginning with alphabets and proceeding to the construction of words and sentences. This teaching method is not suitable for adults. It has had a bad effect on the general rate of progress in literacy by the adults.

OTHER PROBLEMS

The peculiar topography and difficulties arising in the remote, hilly, inaccessible and backward areas affect the operational efficiency of the project in several ways. Firstly, it is not possible to adopt a "compact area" approach of locating adult education centres in the district in one or two contiguous blocks. The clusters of villages are widely scattered in vast areas and the population in any single habitation is too small to allow for more than one centre. The project at present has 175 centres. These are distributed in six blocks in addition to the ten model centres allotted to the District Training Institute. The desirability of adopting the compact area approach was discussed both at the district and project levels but, owing to the extreme difficulties of terrain and topography, the departure from the usual compact area approach in the case of this project, was unavoidable.

The topography and the difficulties of the terrain make it extremely difficult for one supervisor to supervise 30 adult education centres

effectively. The public transport system is far from satisfactory. Even when it is available, the bus takes the supervisor to a nearest spot on the road-side and thereafter the supervisor has to trek the long distances through difficult and inaccessible hilly tracks to reach the centre. In areas of such difficult terrain, the standard norm of 30 centres per supervisor is impractical. These norms will have to be relaxed. Twenty centres per supervisor seems reasonable.

Again, the supervisors, in such difficult areas, who have to trek long distances on foot in order to reach their centres, require additional equipment, such as special types of shoes suitable for mountainous regions. The fixed travel and daily allowances admissible to supervisors at present is not sufficient in these areas. It may be desirable to consider giving a hill allowance to the supervisors in these areas in order at least to cover the cost of shoes. However, if that is not possible, the purchase of special types of shoes out of the fixed allowances might be treated as a legitimate additional charge.

The migratory life-style of the population who move to highland pastures with their cattle and livestock for five or six months in a year create special problems in this region. The course at the adult education centre has to be interrupted for five months or so and then restarted when the population comes back to the lowlands. In a few cases, however, when the majority of the learners in a particular centre move to highland pastures in a particular location, the instructor can also move with them and run the centre at the new place. This has happened in some cases but, by and large, the continuity of the programme has suffered. There is perhaps no escape from carrying out the programme in two phases of five months with a gap of five months in between.

REMEDIAL MEASURES

Model Centres

In order to improve the pedagogical and operational efficiency of adult education centres, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir has allotted ten adult education centres to each of the fourteen District Institutes of Education set up in each district of the State. One of the District Institutes of Education is located in Kishtwar Block. The team visited this Institute and had discussions with the Principal, Shri D.C.Sharma, and one Senior Master in charge of the Adult Education Cell in the Institute. The Adult Education Cell and the ten model adult education centres had just been started. It was not possible to visit any of these centres but discussions with the Principal of the Institute and members of the Adult Education Cell gave some idea about the planning. The plan is to make the adult education centres models for the district. It is proposed that the resources available at the Institute (film projector, film strips, art materials, workshops, publications, etc. together with training skills) be utilised for improving the pedagogical and operational efficiency of the ten adult education centres. The Institute plans to employ the artists to make attractive wall charts, posters and other visual aids which relate to the teaching-learning materials used at the adult education centres, and to display them prominently at each of these centres.

District Resource Consortium

The plan to create ten adult education centres under the direct charge of the District Institute of Education (DIE) is indeed an innovation and is expected to promote the overall operational efficiency of adult education centres in each district. The Adult Education Cell in each DIE is also expected to help all other adult education centres in the district in the

training of adult education functionaries, in the production of visual materials and in the evaluation and research. In other words, the Institute will act as the district resource consortium for improving the technical and pedagogical efficiency of the adult education centres. The model centres set up directly under the Institute will act as pace-setters for all other centres in the district.

Inter-Departmental Cooperation

Another innovation in the field of adult education in the State is the direct linkage of the adult education programme with two other departments, Handicrafts and Social Welfare. In the State as a whole the adult education programme has been introduced in more than 400 handicraft centres run by the Handicrafts Department. Similarly, it has also been introduced in quite a number of training centres run by the State Department of Social Welfare. As the report on one of the handicraft centres visited by the team shows, this innovation has proved successful in promoting an effective inter-departmental coordination. The Education Department has a highly motivated, captive and homogeneous group of learners for promoting adult education. It provides inputs in the form of an honorarium to the craft instructor and the teaching-learning materials. From the report on the progress of centres visited by the team, the adult education centres, set up under such arrangements of cooperation between the Education Department and the other departments, have shown better progress than the other centres.

Inter-departmental cooperation has also been practised in the training of adult education functionaries by the Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the Education Department. Since the majority of learners in the district own lands of their own, although small in size, the District Agricultural Officer, in cooperation with the Project Officer for Adult Education, organised a couple of training courses for the adult education functionaries. The Agriculture Department also brought a number of resource persons in the field of agriculture, extension, animal husbandry, health etc. to help the trainees acquire practical knowledge in these areas. The entire cost of the training was borne by the District Agricultural Office; this meant a saving in the financial provision made in the Rural Functional Literacy Programme.

However, the inter-departmental cooperation between the Departments of Education and Agriculture has been confined to the training of adult education functionaries. It has not permeated to the grass-roots level. Few, if any, of the field-level functionaries from either the Agriculture Department or the Departments of Animal Husbandry, Health, and Rural Development have ever visited any of the adult education centres. This neglect has been due mainly to the fact that the District Adult Education Coordination Committee, set up a year ago under the chairmanship of the District Collector, has taken little interest in this programme. Not a single meeting of the Committee was held in its year of existence. This is a matter of serious concern and immediate measures will have to be taken to activate it in order to promote an effective system of inter-departmental cooperation at the district, block and village levels.

Creation of Environment

Steps to create a suitable environment for the adult education programme have been taken at two stages. Firstly, at the time of the initial surveys to decide the location of adult education centres, the surveyors made door-to-door contact and impressed upon the inhabitants the importance of the programme. Secondly, the project staff actively participated at each of the farmers' training camps organised in each block in the district, and capitalised on the presence of a large number of farmers to motivate them to join the

adult education centres set up at various places in the block. Another activity that has helped in the creation of a suitable environment for the programme is the weekly programme entitled *Navilo* (New Light) started by the Jammu Station of All-India Radio in the Dogri language. This weekly programme is relayed every Saturday between 6.30 and 7.15 p.m. and provides extensive interviews with the adult education learners of different centres. The field team visits one centre every week and holds discussions with the learners on different matters regarding their motivation, their progress in learning and the benefits derived from the adult education centres. This radio programme seems to have an impact in creating a positive environment.

No other efforts, however, have been made on a continuing basis. The motivational efforts at the time of survey or at the time of the farmers' training camps have been once-off affairs. The *Navilo* radio programme lasted for about six months and was then discontinued. Besides, this programme was in Dogri while most of the learners at the centres speak either Urdu, Hindi or Kashmiri. What is needed is a continuous and sustained effort on various fronts to motivate ever more persons to join the programme.

OBSERVATIONS

This field study of the Rural Functional Literacy Project in Kishtwar-Chatroo Blocks of the Doda District in Jammu and Kashmir shows the strong and weak points as well as a few problems peculiar to the area. The weak points of the programme relate generally to the teaching-learning process, including the unsuitability of the reading materials provided, the absence of other teaching aids such as teaching charts and supplementary learning materials, the indifference of the field-level functionaries in development departments and agencies towards supplementing the teaching of instructors, and the inadequacy of supervision and guidance for the centres due to lack of communications and difficulties of terrain. All these deficiencies in the programme will have to be overcome by taking immediate corrective measures as suggested above.

The strong points of the programme are, firstly, that almost all the adult education centres, particularly the female ones, are not merely learning centres but learning-cum-vocational training centres; secondly, that the linkages established with the Departments of Handicrafts and Social Welfare make adult education an integral part of the craft and training centres; thirdly, the establishment of the model adult education centres in the district under the aegis of the District Institute of Education; and lastly, the creation of a special cell on adult education in the District Institute of Education, to serve as a district resource consortium for improving the teaching-learning process at the adult education centres.

(Based on data provided by Mr H.R. Gugnani, Assistant Education Adviser, Ministry of Education and Culture, Department of Education, New Delhi, India.)