Education of Out-of-School Children

Case Studies of Selected Non-Formal Learning Programmes in South Asia

Commonwealth Secretariat

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Compiled and edited by
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Acknowledgements

This volume of case studies on alternatives to schooling is, in a sense, a collective effort. I hope that listening to different voices, with distinct approaches, gives immediacy to what may seem academic issues to planners and policy makers.

Participation which is seen as pivotal to the success of the programmes needs to be strengthened by sharing experiences and ideas amongst field workers, voluntary organisations, academicians, planners and policy makers. This is a modest beginning in this direction. I am grateful to the Commonwealth Secretariat for making such an effort possible.

The introduction is largely the result of discussions with Mr Anil Bordia. I take this opportunity to thank him for giving me his time and for his suggestions. I also thank Mr S Srinivasan for his secretarial assistance.

ARUNA ROY

PREFACE

Provision for the retention of primary school pupils beyond the first few years of schooling is an endemic problem in the developing member countries of the Commonwealth. In recognition of this stark reality the learning needs of children by-passed by the formal system were discussed at the pan-Commonwealth Specialist Conference on Non-Formal Education for Development held in New Delhi, in February 1979. That conference recommended that member states should "ensure that non-formal education programmes are available to provide drop-outs and school leavers with second chances for education, thus enabling them to acquire knowledge and skills for self-employment". To facilitate this the conference also recommended that the Commonwealth Secretariat should commission a series of monographs/case studies on specific ongoing non-formal education programmes for children and adults and ensure that they are widely circulated.

Commonwealth Ministers of Education at their meeting in Colombo in 1980 examined the role of non-formal education in the context of the development of human resources. Recognising that many systematic and vital learning activities take place outside the school they agreed that non-formal education could significantly contribute to the expansion of basic learning opportunities at all levels, particularly in meeting the needs of groups such as un-schooled and under-schooled children, adolescents, adult illiterates and especially women in rural areas. They welcomed the recommendation calling for systematic collection and dissemination of information through case studies on current programmes of non-formal education for out-of-school children.

The present study is a response to that concern. Significant action has been taken in the Asian sub-continent. In Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka non-government agencies have been active in the last few years in providing alternative forms of schooling. India and Bangladesh have given high priority in their current development plans to the universalisation of primary education by utilising both formal and non-formal systems. The present volume of case studies which is the first in a series is therefore devoted to this region.

We are grateful to Mrs Aruna Roy for compiling and editing this volume. The case studies reflect a variety of approaches. In her introduction the experiences of administrators and planners concerned with the provision of education to children out-of-school are ably analysed and presented.

The views expressed and factual presentations contained in this book are those of the authors and the editor and not necessarily those of the Commonwealth Secretariat. We recommend this volume to the attention of all those concerned with the provision of education to out-of-school children - a need which remains a major challenge for educational policy-makers throughout the Commonwealth.

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EDUCATION OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Aruna Roy

The Commonwealth Conference on Non-Formal Education and Development took place in New Delhi in January 1979. The Conference expressed concern that a number of Commonwealth countries were still unable to universalise primary education, and it recommended the adoption of a variety of non-formal education programmes to supplement the ongoing efforts at extension and improvement of schooling for children in the primary age group.

Non-formal education was also considered by the Commonwealth Education Conference held in Colombo in 1980. The Ministers of Education of Commonwealth countries who participated in that conference noted that while non-formal education had been on the agenda of educational planners for over 10 years, there was little resource support and documentation on this subject. The Commonwealth Secretariat was therefore asked to examine the possibilities of supporting research in non-formal education. In this context they further recommended that the Commonwealth Secretariat take steps to compile and to publish case studies of non-formal education projects from Commonwealth countries to understand the various aspects of this subject, and to facilitate planning of such programmes in countries of the Commonwealth. Among these they gave particular priority to learning opportunities for out-of-school children.

The Commonwealth Secretariat proposed this study with the intention of identifying non-formal education projects for children in the age group 5-14 on which case studies could be prepared. The assignment was accepted with some hesitation, because of the limited number of non-formal education projects which cater to children in the specified age group. An acquaintance with some projects however reinforced the immense promise they hold for the poor. The task has therefore been one of enquiry and hope.

Before the selection of the projects for case studies it was necessary to be clear about the type of programmes that could be useful. All the case studies in this volume are on projects run by non-governmental organisations. This was not accidental. Frankly, despite the search, we could not locate successful governmental programmes for this age group in the rural areas. Innovative programmes require freedom of operation, so that they can identify alternatives. It is perhaps that non-formal education lends itself to experimentation and is best done

outside the education system as it is now understood. Nevertheless, sufficient ideas have emerged and methods detailed which governments may take up for consideration and incorporation in their programmes.

To begin with, the concept of non-formal education needed to be clarified. The term 'non-formal' continues to be used and understood in many different ways, in spite of the attempt of Philip Coombs to define it in New Paths to Learning[1] as:

> "... any organised educational activity outside the established formal systems - whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity - that is intended to serve identifiable clienteles and learning activities."

The Michigan State University which has also popularised the study of non-formal education defines the concept with reference to a range of educational situations. According to them non-formal education is:[2]

> "... any non-school learning where both the source and the learner have conscious intent to promote learning."

Projects which are involved with educational activity outside the establishment define themselves as formal or non-formal depending upon the degree of deviation from the formal system that they accept as the norm. The range of the projects vary from a complete questioning of the educational system to supportive attempts to remove identified constraints within it. Governments, on the other hand, see non-formal education as low cost programmes which can be entrusted to non-governmental agencies, where the norms of formal education are not necessarily applicable, and are to an extent, irrelevant.

Non-formal has also become 'jargon', a word which is used without clarity. The variations in interpretation of the concept could be as diverse as it is baffling. This is no doubt made much worse by those who tend to see a particular interpretation as the correct one. In practice, however, such watertight distinctions do not exist. Most of the non-formal education programmes at present use the school buildings for instruction, employ teachers on an honorarium basis and may not make any variation in curriculum or in methods of pupil evaluation. They try to condense primary education curriculum and organise educational activity in the evenings to enable the learners to continue their work on the farm or at home.

A flexible approach was adopted in identifying the case studies. As a result, some of them may seem almost indistinguishable from formal primary education. This only goes to show the range of educational experiments that fall within non-formal education. The considerations were: (a) that the age group covered should correspond to pre-primary or primary education levels; (b) that the programme should have characteristics which clearly distinguish it from the traditionally understood pre-primary or primary schools; (c) that the intent and structure of the programme should be defined by a desire to extend

basic education to the poor who, ordinarily, may not be able to benefit from formal primary schools, and (d) that the projects should have been in existence long enough to draw valid conclusions.

Having set up this frame of reference, suitable projects were sought in the various countries of the Commonwealth. Available literature was examined and consultations with the officials and scholars of the various regions held. It was found that in most parts of the world non-formal education was almost indistinguishable from training of out-of-school youth or adult education. The emphasis and preference among practically all Commonwealth countries seems to be for full-time formal schooling for the children in the appropriate age group.

In the Caribbean, every country gives high priority to primary education and many of them are fairly close to achieving universal primary education. Although the African-American Institute has compiled a number of interesting programmes in their publication 'Non-formal Education in African Development' (1972), we found very little material, even of an experimental nature, about non-formal programmes for children aged 5-14 in the Commonwealth African region. There are a number of African Commonwealth countries which have very interesting non-formal education programmes for youth and adults. Programmes such as the Botswana Brigades and the Kenya Village Polytechnics, designed for integrating young people who have completed primary education into the process of rural development, do merit careful study and analysis. But they are outside the scope of this study.

In Asia there is a large variety of non-formal education programmes for children. For example, Indonesia and Thailand have been active in the spheres of community development and population education. The programmes prepared by SEAMEO, as far as they concern the Commonwealth countries of South-East Asia are restricted to post-primary education. It is due to these reasons that the study had to be confined to the sub-continent, many of the countries of which have been striving to universalise primary education, with varying degrees of success. In this region too, some interesting experiments of non-formal education can be identified. Of necessity therefore, the study had to confine itself to the three Commonwealth countries of the sub-continent.

Analysis of the Milieu

India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka share a common heritage and have had continuous historical and cultural exchange through the centuries and share, broadly speaking, common socio-economic problems. Even three decades after independence, India and Bangladesh face a common predicament in not being able to universalise elementary education within the formal system of education.

Education policies have made sporadic efforts to accommodate the demands of a rapidly growing population. In spite of the phenomenal increase in the number of children admitted to elementary schools, a staggering number still do not go to school. Facilities in the form of school

buildings have increasingly been located in villages. A review of education when preparing India's Sixth Five Year Plan shows that formal primary education facilities have substantially increased and primary schools are available to 95 per cent of the population within walking distance among children in the 6-11 age group. Actually, almost 75 per cent of children of school-going age, mostly from the poor and disadvantaged class, particularly girls, do not complete their schooling.

> "The modern educational system in India is now a vast undertaking with over 700,000 institutions, 100 million students, 3.5 million teachers and a cost of Rs.26,000 million (next only to that on defence); and yet its chief beneficiaries are the upper and middle classes who form about 50 per cent of those who complete elementary school, and occupy about 70 per cent of the places in secondary education and 80 per cent of those in higher education. The vast bulk of the poor are still outside the system: 60 per cent of the adult population is still illiterate, and as many as 75 per cent of the children in the 6-14 age group do not complete elementary school. The masses therefore still continue to be educated almost exclusively through the traditional incidental and non-formal sub-systems, which, by mere passage of time, have become even more obsolete today. The gap between them and the upper and middle class educated in the modern formal school has therefore become even wider than it was 60 years ago."[3]

The reasons for drop-out are poverty, social customs and unattractive and irrelevant instruction. From age five onwards, poor children are busy the whole day long in assisting their parents in agriculture and other tasks, or are required to earn a living for themselves.

Poverty and the School

An analysis of those who reach the school system in the project areas pertaining to the case studies shows that those children who attend formal schools come from families which can afford to relieve them from the burden of generating income. In spite of differences which relate to the socio-economic levels of various groups in the different countries, non-formal education is preoccupied with the under-privileged and the poor. Poverty and an understanding of its relationship with non-schooling is therefore relevant.

> "The educational scene has also been dismal according to expert opinion. The so-called development policies and action followed for more than two decades until recently on the iniquitous base of the social structure in effect contributed to polarising disparities of income and education." (Rowshan Qadir; see pp. 79-80).*

There is little doubt that elementary education has failed to reach the under-privileged. The major reason for this lack of access is poverty.

* i.e., in this volume

> "At the same time the main reason for non-enrolment has been identified as the poverty of families who are forced to treat the child as an economic asset rather than send her or him to school. From such reasoning it becomes apparent that:
> (a) where educational facilities have expanded they have catered to those who can afford to send their children to school; and
> (b) even if much greater expansion were undertaken, education would still not reach the poor unless the conditions of their poverty are changed. Most of the government schemes have, however, tried to solve the problem by administrative and curricular reforms with increased allocation of funds. Few have attempted to tackle the inter-relationship with poverty, far less to understand it." (A.K. Roy; see p.94).

Poverty of the parents compels them to involve the child in earning a living. This is, by and large, a universal phenomenon which keeps the majority of the children out of schools. The relation between poverty and the lack of access to schools is perhaps too obvious to need emphasis But it is necessary to re-state the linkages between the two. The low income levels of the parents and the socio-economic development of the community therefore become relevant issues for consideration. Socio-economic development of an area has not necessarily meant a fairer distribution of income. Lack of access to formal school for the poor is evident even in areas where there has been a fairly rapid growth in economic terms. The glaring example of the formal school being located in the richer part of the village, thereby denying access to children belonging to the poorer areas, is not rare.

> "The Panchayat Union and Government schools are all located in the upper caste sections of the village..." (T.K. Sundari; see p. 63).

It is a common complaint that the poor are apathetic and indifferent to their own development. Reaction to schooling is cited as an example of their apathy. It is obvious that the poor do not express a need for schooling. The schools therefore pass them over. The formal school exists as a facility outside the community. It does not involve itself in motivational or even educational work with those in the community who do not avail themselves of its services. To make demands on the educational system, the poor need an information base and confidence to express themselves. While adult education porgrammes have attempted to educate the parents on the need for schooling for their children a working elementary school has to demonstrate that useful learning can be provided within the constraints of the locale, that in fact the school can recognise the constraints and modify its functioning to suit the children. Parents have to see that the school is not a threat to the economic role of the child as a contributor to the family income; but despite its many limitations the school has to be seen, as one of the major alternatives that the under-privileged have, to adapt, modify or change their role in society.

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves why formal schools are looked upon as useful only by the privileged within a community. This questioning has to become a genuine exercise in which the community, the teacher and the child participate. Only then can the resultant planning be meaningful. What these case studies illustrate are the reasons for the rejection of schooling that derive from poverty, and what may be done to accommodate the community's needs within a framework of learning for children. The analysis for non-attendance in formal schools and its relationship to poverty bears a family resemblance, whether it is in Gonopathsala or Sarvodaya Shramadana. (See R.S. Qadir, pp 79-92; A.T. Ariyaratne, pp 125-30).*

Given the common agreement that non-schooling is related to poverty, the case studies offer a range of possible approaches, all of which differ from one another in specifics and even in method, but are comparable in effectiveness. It seems reasonable to suppose, therefore, that such and many more efforts are possible given the fact that (if) educational plans arise from the participation of the community in defining its problems and alternatives. The case studies have amply demonstrated the need for an alternative to school.

Participation

It is clear that there are links between poverty and education, and schooling. Almost all efforts to understand the reasons for drop-outs from school accept this reason as pre-eminent. But, when plans are made, educational policy does not give sufficient thought to the links that need to be established at the levels of planning and implementation. Most well-meant schemes do not produce results at field level as the community does not 'participate'.

Participation is an important and well-recognised input in planning and implementation. At the same time it is the least definable of processes. However, some broad categories have been listed by Philip Coombs:

> "Standing alone, 'community participation' is just as ambiguous a term as 'integration'. It acquires concrete meaning only when viewed in a specific context. There are numerous types and degrees of community participation, ranging across a wide spectrum. At the one extreme, villagers may participate negatively ... at the other extreme is the village that has organised itself democratically to examine its needs and options, to make decisions and plans to mobilize its own resources, and to seek specific kinds of help from outside sources to fill gaps and break bottlenecks beyond its own capacity. Most villages seem to fall between these extremes."[4]

Participation is understood to be relevant and the process of participation makes inevitable the recognition of subsequent and dependent actions. In other words:

* i.e., in this volume

> "If participation is to be effective, it will be essential that those who hold power do not block innovative learning. Participation is more than the formal sharing of decisions; it is an attitude characterised by cooperation, dialogue, and empathy. It means not only keeping communications open but also constantly testing one's operating rules and values, retaining those that are relevant and rejecting those that have become obsolescent."[5]

If the poor are to accept schooling, they have to be involved in the process that looks at the issues critically. The concept of schooling, if not education, has to become more apparent both in a literal as well as a metaphorical sense.

> "The right to participate is integrally linked with a right to learn."[6]

While there is recognition of the notion of participation, very few planners and administrators follow it up. This is partly because the process of genuine participation involves dialogue and other exchanges of an intimate nature which governments cannot bring about. There are besides, difficulties arising out of identifying a community of people who may respond to initiatives from outside. There is also an unexpressed apprehension that it may not be worth the effort of government to try out any project that does not allow for replication.

The success of the projects discussed in the case studies lies mainly in the ability of the organisers of the programmes to initiate, involve and sustain the interest of the community in appreciating their own situation.

> "The communities which have now participated in planning and conducting the part-time classes in the action research project have become aware of their capability to think about their education problems. Some villages have suggested short follow-up courses in health, child-care and nutrition, occupational skills and so on. They are ready to find part of the resources and help plan and organise the courses." (Chitra Naik; see p.47).

> "When the Oraons first came to the Shahdol area, they were regarded as expert earth-movers. They could literally move mountains of earth to develop agricultural land or to reshape territory for mining and industrial operations. They settled near Naura's village and the first batch came to clear Naura's land of vegetation and to make it arable. They stayed on to learn about vegetable cultivation, to decipher the alphabet in the evenings, to read the clock for work timings, to add and subtract their wages and bonuses ... Through their self activity, they helped Naura to develop the course content, the games, and the pedagogy." (A.K. Roy; see p.102).

Participation involves sharing a common concern; identifying the causal patterns for the existence of problems together and seeking solutions that are sometimes mutually acceptable to the two involved in a dialogue; reciprocating and sustaining the common concern; continued communication; and empathy. Participation is therefore crucial to the development of programmes which are effective and relevant.

The alternative offered by the case studies is a schooling system emerging from the environment after having identified the areas of learning which are relevant and creative. Under these circumstances, non-formal education is primarily concerned with equipping the child to deal with problems arising from the environment. If that is so, in a majority of cases, the objective of the non-formal education programme is primarily to allow children and the community to shape its programmes in a manner in which it becomes a tool not only of schooling but of learning, to focus on demands that help decide, in a manner that is relevant to them.

The process of non-formal education is such that it precludes even an attempt at prescribing a uniform model for decentralisation. The approach of non-formal education is area specific and clients specific. In determining who is going to benefit from the programme, the approaches have to look at not only where the activity is to be located, but who in that area is to share the benefits of that activity. The location of the school in a village is in itself not sufficient to draw the children to school - as evident in the analysis of the reasons for non-attendance in schools. The school has often to be located in the poorer part of the village for the more under-privileged group to attend, or in a special local area to draw a particular group into school. Apart from the geographical location of the school, it has to identify clearly the group within the community it has to reach and involve them in the activities of planning for the school. The basic question that arises is whether anything but a decentralised programme of activity can ever actually reach the poor, in a sense that is both meaningful and useful. For participation to be effective, there has to be decentralisation and planning at the grass roots level.

The Child: An Analysis of his Role in Society

The child has little choice in deciding which school he will attend. In the case of a poor child, school is either impossible or terrifying. Legislation notwithstanding, children in many regions in the sub-continent are part of the work force. Though this is mainly related to poverty, it is also related to the irrelevance of the formal educational system itself. The parent decides that the child is better off with informal learning which will ensure social adjustment. A child who grows up as a shepherd is more likely to settle down at home than one who goes to school and comes home discontented and maladjusted. From one child's point of view:

> "I was very keen on going to school, but my parents made me stay back at home after I finished class one. They

> wanted me to take care of the goats. Now when I take books home from this evening school and read and write, they say, 'If this child had gone to school, imagine how well he would have done!' Only now they realise this. Earlier they used to say, 'what is the use of going to school, you won't learn a paisa's worth ...' Now they say, 'Poor child, he should have been allowed to study further ...'" (T.K. Sundari; see p.69).

The child in this milieu is a responsible wage-earner. The process of learning becomes meaningful to the parents only if it is useful. Even though alternative methods of learning bring games and story-telling lessons to the school child, the involvement with what may seem to be adult preoccupations demands attention to problems in his daily life. In a story-telling session, T.K. Sundari recalls that the children made even the prince and princess work as bonded labourers. If the child is bonded, it becomes his norm and the only way he knows how to live. School does not change his bondage.

In such a situation, the child is to be treated as part adult and part child. The understanding of his role demands that the education that is planned for him takes both roles into consideration. The part-time non-formal school understands the child's predicament, and plans for it. The curriculum includes the child's environment and his situational demands. The school has to become an organic part of the child's life. Only then can it get the right to question the role of the child in his society and explore other alternatives, and stimulate enquiry and criticism.

From the child's own point of view, school can be stimulating if it adjusts itself marginally to his needs. The school that relates to him and wins his confidence brings him in. The case studies demonstrate the willingness of children to attend school and their creativity when they are participants in the learning process. Those who were the drop-outs and the push-outs are regulars at school.

It is essential to understand the predicament of the child out-of-school and make him the focus of planning. If the child is in focus, learning has of necessity to be relevant and meaningful. The approach and method can vary from one project to another, as indeed they do. But there is common agreement that to counter the monolith that formal education is today, non-formal schools have to start reinforcing the fundamental commitment of learning, to place the learner in a position of pre-eminence, to make adjustments whenever necessary, but not sacrifice learning needs for the expediency of standardisation and evaluation.

To sum up, the under-privileged child's predicament is that the child is (i) an inherent part of the work force of the family - employed either in working with the parents or as a wage labourer in the village. The child from the age of five or six has to participate actively in

an adult occupation. With the exception of the BACE project,* all the other studies recognise that alternative employment has either to be provided in the school to the child or that timing has to be changed. (ii) The child's inability to attend school relates also to the fact that what he learns in school alienates him from life around him. Since learning is not related to the environment, to many of them it is irrelevant. (iii) Struggle for sheer physical survival governs the lives of poor families. The mid-day meal becomes an important part of full-time non-formal programmes and this aspect of nutrition is brought to light both by the Sri Lanka and Bangladesh projects.

The Community's Point of View

The community is not homogenous. The poor within a community or in a village are often distanced not only metaphorically but also in a literal sense. Facilities have traditionally been enjoyed by the privileged. The school is one such facility which to the poor parent represents certain values and culture - a culture that may be viewed with sympathy or suspicion. The school is on the periphery of village life and while it may succeed with the student who rises in life and comes back a success, it has failed generally as a means to employment. The number of hangers-on and dissatisfied youth has increased. The school is useful for some, of course. But for the poor it is a gamble, that may not pay off. The odds are too high.

> "In reply to a question, 'why she did not send her children to school', in a survey, an earning mother replied 'the school does not provide him or her food, but working somewhere else he or she can procure food." (Rowshan Qadir; see p.79).

The under-privileged and the poor have often to forego their daily income to invest in the education of their children. It would not be possible for the poor to divert children from gainful occupations to involvement with the formal school, only to find that the children have developed permanent handicaps. Aspirations for jobs created are often not satisfied. The risk is too high.

> "For a poor parent, the primary need for children is to provide food first, not education. They think that education does not provide any solution to children's practical life. (Rowshan Qadir; see p.79).

The rigidity of the formal system prevents adjustment to local demands, which may have made the school more acceptable.

The community has a variety of needs. The kind of education offered has, however, been uniform, standardised and unimaginative. Even technical education has been linked not to traditional occupational

* see pp. 50-60

skills in village communities but to school leaving certificates. The picture of education leading to self-employment remains sketchy to say the least. The school remains a vaguely edifying experience, which in many cases leads to alientation. In the Shram Niketan experiment in India therefore, agricultural production which has and continues to absorb the major part of the work force has been made the basis of educational activity. The school runs along with it.

To enliven the present schooling system new ideas have to be drawn from activities outside the school.

> "... we have to develop alternative structures and strategies involving the entire community and the resources available within it. What children learn in school should bring about behavioural changes applied to real life situations..." (A.T. Ariyaratne; see p.125).

The parents of children out of school view formal education as unsuitable. The timing of the school is inconvenient to the child and it does not instruct him in skills needed to obtain meaningful employment.

Formal education is not tailored to either help the child to learn about his environment or to prepare him to cope with the outside world. The community, in many cases, has not considered an alternative to the formal school because it has known no other.

The gap between the expectation from the educational system and the reality of unsatisfied demands has motivated a number of organisations to try to identify approaches to education which may be more useful from the community's point of view and which may even fall outside the formal system. Once an alternative model has been identified the community's response has been positive.

Assumptions regarding Formal Education

Formal education has been found purposeless and unsatisfying from the point of view of many under-privileged communities. An analysis of the reasons why the school has been rejected brings into relief a number of inherent limitations in the system.

> "The shortcomings in the formal system consist not only of failures in strategy, scarcity of rescoures or certain characteristics of its bureaucratisation or institutionalisation, but also in the values and ideas perpetuated through its techniques of communication and by the interpersonal relationship within the system." (T.K. Sundari; see p. 65).

In the critique offered by the Indian and Sri Lankan projects and Gonopathsala in Bangladesh, the system is found to reach only a few and is unable to adapt to a variety of demands. It works on the basis of imported models and does not utilise resources available locally.

* see pp. 93-111

> "Some societies, notably those with a recent history of colonialism, are burdened with irrelevance of a double dimension, not only are their educational systems obsolete, but they are fundamentally inappropriate to the cultures into which they have been transplanted. The wholesale, carbon copy transfer of foreign learning models and the subsequent indiscriminate devaluation of traditional learning has left many developing countries with the ultimate in non-anticipatory and non-participatory learning."[7]

In importing many of the ideas of education, the formal system depends heavily on resources which are expensive. The investment in terms of textbooks and teachers make it impossible for the formal system to cover all areas that need to be covered. The formal school plans on the basis of general predetermined standards and fails to take into consideration the environmental differences and the varying needs of the clientele.

> "However, they /children/ should not be mere consumers of social product but be conscious participants and accelerators of the process of change. To ensure this we have to develop alternative structures and strategies involving the entire community and the resources available within it. What children learn in school should bring about behavioural changes applied to real life situations." (A.T. Ariyaratne; see p.125).

Formal education has ceased to satisfy one of its own admitted major objectives of training children to earn. Universal schooling was evolved as a strategy by governments for satisfying mapower needs. The links between schooling and employment is all pervasive. But this is a function that formal education no longer performs well.

> "... communities have come to recognise that education does not mean employment and that the present system of education alienates children from work." (Rowshan Qadir; see p.79).

It is in fact felt that the child who goes through formal education is often alienated from the environment and that an educational system which alienates the child from one enviornment while not adequately preparing him for absorption into another, has in-built deficiences.

> "Even the learning gained by being in school does not seem to throw much light on the future. So much so that even a successful learner often isolates himself from real life situations and the longer he stays in the system, the less able he is to relate to his environment." (A.T. Ariyaratne; see p.126).

> "In a recent learned paper, Chowdhury calls education in Bangladesh 'dysfunctional'. Primary education does not help the child to affirm his relations with

> nature and other ecological forces and as such does not impart receptiveness to change." (Rowshan Qadir; see p.80).

The reasons for this lie to a large extent in the nature of the education system. The analysis of the reasons for its failure points to a system which is a legacy from the British and which has long outlived its value, but is still persisted in. Lord Macaulay stated that:

> "... a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia ... It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England ..."[8]

The education system proposed by Lord Macaulay and implemented during colonial days therefore does not relate to, or satisfy current demands. Almost all the case studies analyse the shortfalls of the system that was introduced to train the maintenance staff of an empire, while the demands today are for development oriented education.

By implication, the content and method of education in the formal system are also criticised in the case studies in this volume. Unless the content of education is made meaningful to the learner and till such time as scientific methods are evolved and introduced to communicate with the learner, the defects in the formal system will continue to alienate the child from the school.

The formal system of education has become examination oriented. There is rejection of the examination system by children from under-privileged homes. Examinations demand free time for concentrated study. The BACE project in Bangladesh argues against repetition. To prevent the evils of competition and comparison the RDS schools do not have a formal evaluation system. Primarily, however, the examination system, viewed from the eyes of the learner himself, is terrifying. Children who are handicapped by having to work for their living have found it difficult to cope with the kind of examinations that they have to pass even at the primary level.

There is also the financial handicap in putting up the physical infrastructure required to make elementary schooling possible for all children in the age group 6-14. It is surprising that there has been no widespread attempt at establishing non-formal education programmes for elementary schooling with Government support until quite recently.

> "As primary education cannot physically cope with the children presently enrolling, about 7-8 million, and as little physical renovation has been carried out, it is hardly possible that 12 million children (the present primary school age group) can be accommodated in the

> schools by 1985 even under a double-shift system. There simply are not enough schools, classrooms, benches, or teachers let alone other educational facilities such as simple equipment or books to enable Bangladesh to provide universal primary education. At present the enrolment of 12 million children is not a practical possibility, not to speak of their retention in the school for five years." (Ellen Sattar; see p.50).

One of the major shortcomings of the system as it is today has been its inability to draw girls to school. The girls school, especially if the school is part-time and in the evenings, has faced a number of problems. In a majority of them, girls continue to keep out of school.

The Teacher

In all the case studies there is implicit comment on the formal school teacher who does not belong to the community, cannot relate to it and is therefore only partially successful in drawing children to school. The community however has been conditioned to think of the school teacher as somebody who had a certificate to teach. As Lakshminarayan, a village teacher says:

> "I am a village teacher. I have only a Higher Secondary certificate and no formal training. When I first became involved with the primary education programme, I had to face gossip and mistrust from those of my villagers who had a higher degree of formal education and training than I. They thought it would not be possible for me to 'compete' with the urban trained school teacher. Even I did not think that I could do so. After all, my knowledge was so limited. In the first six months of my training as a teacher, I learnt that I could be a competent teacher. At the end of the experimental phase, three years after the school had begun, I was willing to face evaluation by an impartial committee from any school in my region." (Aruna Roy; see p.141).

In most of the case studies under review, the teacher is not trained formally. His educational level is also not prescribed. It is left very much to the community and the project organisers to decide the level of formal education of the teacher that is considered adequate. In areas where there is greater literacy and consequent unemployment, non-formal teachers are found to have better formal qualifications, whereas in regions where literacy levels are low the projects have settled for much less. In fact there is agreement that trained teachers are not necessarily better than untrained teachers.

The other issue is the selection of the teacher. A teacher who is selected by the community has been found to satisfy the requirements of learning objectives as understood by non-formal education. Non-formal schools are concerned with organisation of learning in a manner that the child is not alienated from the environment. For the process to be

effective, it is very important that the teacher be from the same environment as the learner so that they share the values and culture.

It is also important that the teacher be acceptable to the community from the moral and social points of view. There is an increasing emphasis in non-formal education programmes on the de-professionalisation of the role of the teacher. Professional teachers see this move as a threat to their jobs. The opening up of the profession to those without certificates not only questions the competence but the necessity of formal training, and devalues the professional teacher. To those who are familiar with development concerns, this argument is not unrelated to issues of the bare-foot doctor of the village level health worker. The planners and the administrators will have to recognise the importance of a teacher who is not formally trained, since non-formally trained teachers have a major role to play in universalising elementary education.

Learner Equivalence and Evaluation

Learner equivalence can be seen in many ways: (i) as provision of similar opportunities to the learners in non-formal education as in formal education to enable them to continue their education in formal and professional courses; (ii) as reviewing the connections between formal education and employment and evolving a realistic correlation; and (iii) as comparable certification upon the completion of schooling through either formal or non-formal systems. The projects can do no more than pose the dilemma that confronts a genuine effort to tackle the problems of schooling at the grass roots level. Equivalence between formal and non-formal schooling is an issue that has to be seen in the context of a national or at best a regional level, and is outside the area of decision-making on projects.

The approaches in non-formal education are based on different assumptions but all arising from an identification of problems existing in formal education. One of the areas which comes in for severe criticism is the examination system, which by its lack of imagination and rigidity defeats its own purpose of evaluating learners. The case studies demonstrate that learner evaluation has to be area specific and even pupil specific to make it a creative and positive process. In arguing for recognition of certification by non-formal schools, non-formal projects implicitly express the need for having multiple approaches and an approximation in standards, or imply that only those pupils who want to go into middle level need conform to uniform prescribed standards. Non-formal education programmes have difficulty in trying to evolve methods by which non-formal learning can be evaluated. For, there must be some criterion of measuring progress. The more effective the method, the more specific it is. Methods of non-formal education evaluation can at best outline a process. This process will have to be evolved with variations depending upon each participant group.

Raison d'Etre of the Projects

Elementary education of the children in the age group 6-14 cannot be the sole responsibility of formal education in most Third World countries. Formal education has not been able to cope with the diversification and decentralisation necessary to involve the community and look at education seriously. There are other very severe limitations as well. Some of them are: (i) The lack of resources. Even if the governments should decide to universalise elementary education, there would not be enough resources in terms of school buildings, textbooks and other infrastructural requirements. (ii) A shortage of trained teachers. There would not be enough trained teachers to carry on the programme of teaching. (iii) Lack of funds. There would not be sufficient budget allocations for paying salaries of teachers.

Considering all these shortcomings, non-formal education for elementary schooling fulfils either or both of the following functions.

> (i) It fills in the gaps in the formal system by supplementing it and by preparing the drop-outs and push-outs to enter the mainstream at a later stage; or
>
> (ii) it provides for an alternative where the learners are kept outside the formal school system and the pattern of schooling relates to the environment and the immediate concerns of the participant group and implicitly questions the reasons why formal education has become dysfunctional.

Non-formal education does not raise 'original' issues. There has been continual concern over the major issues for many years. Alternatives have been designed by many, including Mahatma Gandhi, to introduce changes in the formal system to suit the needs and culture of the people.

> "It seems to me that in our country in which 85 per cent of the population is agricultural and perhaps 10 per cent occupied in supplying the wants of the peasantry, it must be part of the training of every youth that he has a fair practical knowledge of agriculture and hand-weaving. He will lose nothing if he knows a proper use of tools, can saw a piece of board straight and build a wall that will not come down through a faulty handling of the plumber's line. A boy who is thus equipped, will never feel helpless in battling with the world and never be in want of employment."[9]

These issues have been muted by the partial acceptance of concepts, without a major change in approach. The object of any innovative programme in non-formal education today has to question implicitly or explicitly the values that underlie and perpetuate the formal system. Any constructive non-formal programme should, therefore, provoke the planners to look critically at the process once again.

Concerns of the Projects

The projects under review see the non-formal system either as an alternative education system that exists outside the formal system, implying a considerable modification or change in the pattern of education, the curriculum and the method; or supplementing formal education, without questioning fundamental assumptions but filling in the gaps, using imaginative methods which are participatory and relevant.

It is difficult to place the approach of any one project in either of the above mentioned categories without some overlapping of intent. The division of intent only emphasises the broad thrust of the approach. In any case, supplementing formal education becomes a short-term goal, even if the intention is to change the nature and content of formal education.

> "It is also generally conceded that while developing a non-formal channel of primary education, the formal primary school would have to be helped to function better. The two should be mutually supportive devices in the interests of universalisation of primary education... Developing non-formal education rather than intervening directly in the formal system is... the... policy. Yet, improving the performance of the formal system at all levels, so as to render it more responsive to the needs of the disadvantaged sections of society, is also within the scope of its concerns." (Chitra Naik; see p.31).

Broadly, again, formal education is seen as leading to certification and employment, and non-formal as being involved with environment and development concerns.

Schooling and Development

The preoccupation of non-formal education with the poor and underprivileged raises issues which are directly related to development. To quote J. P. Naik:

> "We have now become more keenly aware of the need to relate all education to development. In particular, we have realised that the education of the poor, whether elementary or adult, cannot be divorced from direct efforts to improve their standards of living in which they themselves will have to be intimately involved. A trend has thus begun to combine education and development, especially where the poor are concerned. This is a very significant change which goes far beyond the earlier attempts to merely 'educate' the poor, or to give them an education combined with some welfare services, as a form of charity. It is obvious that this new trend can only be strengthened in the days ahead."[10]

However, for many of those involved at the grass roots, the outlines are blurred. Education and development seem so integrated that it seems unlikely that intervention in one area can leave the other untouched. It is interesting to note that the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement began with a concern for the improvement of the quality and life of the individual. This led to the organisation of the pre-schools and the Shanthi Sena. The SWRC,* Tilonia's interest, is in rural development and in questioning the reasons for poverty. Primary education was identified as one of the important areas for attention. The Savar Gonopathsala is involved in a successful health project with community participation. In BACE, the feeder schools grow out of a co-operative movement. The IIE,+ Poona, links itself to the Zilla Parishad which is the primary development agency at the district level. In the RDS,* issues relating to poverty and women are concerns of the school. Development and education, in fact, are facets of the same problem.

To make learning relevant, schooling has to relate it to the environment, and to identify issues which bring about change. Thus begins an association with development. On the other hand, the non-formal approach to education of children and adults determines the approach of development programmes. Wherever there is a conscious expressed objective of working with the under-privileged, these two areas integrate and thereby support and clarify mutual problems.

> "The Shanthi Sena (Peace Army) Programme of Sarvodaya is an attempt to give form and direction to the development oriented system of education, embracing all young people of school age who are currently in school or out of school. They act as catalysts directing their services and activities to all other age groups within the community."
> (A. T. Ariyaratne; see p.126).

In Sri Lanka, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement has established a whole network of alternative strategies covering a range of activities to satisfy the needs of the community. The non-formal approach of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is a broadening of all concerns, moving out of school and entering areas, which in the eyes of the orthodox, are not educational at all. The non-formal alternatives also explore the possibility of establishing and linking education with areas of children's activities in the environment. Education, by linking itself to the environment, has shifted its focus from employment to learning. The Indian experience as well as those of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have made it explicit that education and learning should equip the child to face day to day problems in the environment.

It may be true that development education is crucial not only for those involved in non-formal schooling and outside the pale of education provided by the structure, but also for those who go through formal education, if it is to be a concerted method to hasten the pace of change.

* Social Work and Research Centre - see pp. 131-52
\+ Indian Institute of Education - see pp. 30-48
* Rural Development Society - see pp. 62-78

> "A major component of assistance is generally in the form of non-formal education programmes to create awareness and to inculcate correct and relevant attitudes in the minds of State extension workers and the members of the community." (A. T. Ariyaratne; see p.130).

If schooling has to make the child and community the focus, their concerns become the school's concerns. Involvement with development is inevitable.

Linkages

Non-formal education has been viewed as an activity or a series of educational activities that functionally exists outside the formal system. Nevertheless, none of these functions of non-formal education can be viewed in isolation from the formal structure. This is specially so, as non-formal education relates to the environment and the formal system is very much part of it. Relationship between formal and non-formal education therefore has to be viewed seriously and linkages between the two systems explored. The case studies review this problem. An approach of "bridging techniques" has been evolved. The BACE feeder schools literally feed children into the formal school; the IIE, Poona has planned for bridge courses to enable children to appear for formal tests and join regular schools. The RDS mentions the opportunities provided by the open university as a means of providing higher education to the children. But the problem still persists. A number of governments do not recognise non-formal schools and do not have facilities of open testing for children with access to learning through systems other than the formal school.

Projects represented in the case studies remain connected with the formal system either through the teacher, the curriculum or certification. However, programmes have not been designed to fit into schemes that can be 'replicated'. Non-formal education programmes run by non-governmental organisations have been succesful but do not lend themselves well to replication, partly because the primary concern of such programmes is innovation and not replication. Replication is an unhappy word to use in connection with non-formal education. The concept of replication or duplication is alien to the designing of non-formal education. Almost all successful projects on non-formal education would not lend themselves to duplication. If they should, the quality of the programme would perhaps deteriorate. Innovative aspects of programmes presented at formal and informal forums have generated interest and experimentation. The usefulness of an experiment in non-formal education is its ability to stimulate thinking on alternatives.

Participation is the determinant of success, in the sense of the community identifying and evolving a strategy for action. Ideally and wherever possible, "the people themselves must have control over the planning and carrying out of education. In the exercise of this control lies education too." [11] There cannot be centralised blueprints for participatory action. Though programmes continue to multiply, yet they are not enough in the context of national or

even regional primary educational needs. This dilemma continues to feature in any major debate on the relationship between formal and non-formal education. The concept of dissemination therefore has to be viewed as distinct from replication.

While considering linkages, the comparative costs of education in formal and non-formal systems also need to be looked at. Whereas formal Government schools give free education, non-formal schools are expected to motivate the community to contribute. The nature of expenditure on non-formal schools need perhaps to be looked at afresh from a different perspective.

> "In the part-time classes, the enrolment consists of those children who have to work during the day. A survey of their occupations has shown (in the project area) that a child of 9-14 may often earn Rs. 4 per day, on an average, for 200 days in the year or may engage in household tasks or assistance to parents, of which the value would amount to similar wages, though this income is not visible. About 1000 pupils earn wages of Rs. 4 per day on an average. Their cumulative daily earnings thus amount to Rs. 4000 per day. Assuming that they work for about 200 days in the year, the total annual earnings would amount to Rs. 800,000 - Rs. 1,600,000 in two years ... As against this income which accrues to the pupils, the expenditure on their part-time education would amount to Rs. 138,000 or, to put it in round figures, about Rs. 140,000. These are points which education planners may find worth examining." (Chitra Naik; see p.46).

Flexibility and Decentralisation

One of the reasons for the success of the non-formal education programmes has been its ability to change and adapt to the needs of the community. This flexibility is possible only if the project's approach and methods are sufficiently decentralised so as to enable those involved to make changes without having to refer issues 'up'. Decentralisation is possible only when the controlling authority plans for delegation of authority to units that are considered appropriate in size and competence. Most projects under review have implicitly stated that the problem of having to report or refer matters to anyone other than a small group or the community would, in the final analysis, defeat the very purpose of non-formal education.

Governments have repeatedly said that community participation has to be an essential part of non-formal education programmes. However:

> "To many observers the characteristics of non-formal education which explain its success are precisely those which are felt to be incompatible with large bureaucracies. The most effective non-formal education programmes exist and survive because of their flexibility ... These kinds of characteristics are very difficult to build into larger-scale government planning bodies. Of necessity, governments require long-term horizons for planning, seeking authorization, obtaining funds, selecting

staff and implementing programmes. Decisions must be reviewed at many levels, with corresponding delays and compromises." [12]

If that is so, the question that arises for consideration is whether governments can, in fact, plan for non-formal education while retaining the flexibility of approach necessary. This poses a set of conflicting demands on planning by Government.

Critical Areas for Structural Change

This leads us to critical areas in which changes have to be made in the formal educational system to give a rightful place to non-formal education. The existing system of primary education is characterised by single point entry, sequential progression and institutional instruction by full-time professional teachers. These are the critical areas which distinguish a formal programme from a non-formal one.

i) Single point entry : Ordinarily a child is expected to enter Class 1 in the school system at the age of 5-6. Although it is true that slightly underage or overage children are also admitted in Class 1, the educational administrators while emphasising enrolment of children refer to a particular age group. It is argued that if older children are admitted, they soon find themselves out of place and drop out. This system has the advantage of creating a homogenous age group in Class 1, and makes class room instruction comparatively easier. On the other hand, if a child, for whatever reason, does not enter or stay in Class 1 (as happens with nearly half of the children who enrol themselves) he loses the only chance he has to receive instruction.

Since large numbers of children have not been able to receive education and are not yet adults, it is obvious that any insistence on single point entry has to be abandoned. Children, say between the age of 8-14, have also got to be absorbed into the system. This would perhaps bring a very large number of children to school.

ii) Sequential Progression : The existing school system is rigidly sequential in that it expects a child to spend a year in one class and to move on to the higher class after passing an examination. There are no doubt exceptions. Many children fail and have to repeat a whole year. In several countries an ungraded system has been introduced, which enables the child to move from one class to another without being formally examined and without a fear of failure. The basic characteristic of the system, one year for one class, has, however, remained undisturbed.

The arrangement which envisages annual progression is also designed to facilitate classroom instruction to groups of children of the same age and attainment. In a number of case studies in this volume, it is demonstrated that comparatively grown up children complete the course of Class 1 to 5 in 2-3

years. Scope for rapid progression, as well as special arrangements for irregular and slow learners is no doubt necessary for the entire educational system, but for the children who would begin learning at a later stage (8-14 age) it is imperative that the annual sequential character is replaced by opportunities provided for condensed learning.

iii) Whole time instruction : This is another characteristic of the formal system of education which works against the interests of the poor. In India and Bangladesh children are expected to work even before they complete five years of age - they work on the farm, tend cattle, or go out to earn small wages in whatever way possible. Girls are generally expected to look after younger children. It is impossible for these children to attend a school run on a whole-time basis. This is a principal reason for the large drop-out rate in primary education.

Since the economic condition of the poor cannot be improved immediately, the only alternative is a system of part-time education. It may enable children to work as well as to learn. This system, as pointed out by J.P. Naik, "should be replaced by another in which every child is required to attend school on a full-time basis, if possible, and on a part-time basis, if necessary." [13]

iv) Insistence on professional teachers : The full-time professional teacher is another typical characteristic of formal schooling. There is a long tradition behind professionalisation of teaching. It is believed that competence and professional training are sufficient for the dissemination of knowledge that is esoteric and specialised. The professional teacher has an urban background and has little empathy with the children he teaches. The system is expensive and economic cuts directly hit the number of children per teacher, increasing the ratio of children. Alternatives have to be identified and soon, if all children should get to school and learn.

There are a number of alternatives to the professional teacher. The local person is one. Another is the village youth who even as he studies can supplement the work of the teacher. It is unfortunate that whenever proposals for using part-time teachers are made, the bogey of educational standards is raised by teachers' associations and even planners and politicians seem to support this stand.

It is apparent that these modifications in the formal system are fundamental and necessary. They could include part-time and short duration courses for children out-of-school and make education the concern and responsibility of a larger number of persons, and involve the community. It is also important to

mention that the reduction in hours of instruction and duration of courses, and the involvement of part-time teachers from the community would make the new system economical for the governments and within the reach of even the poorest.

v) Standardised curriculum : The curriculum in formal schools has failed to relate teaching to the environment. Though much can be done even within the formal system to make curriculum relevant, efforts have been made only in the past decade or so. The non-formal programmes for elementary schools evolve the curriculum from environmental needs, and which may not necessarily remain within the bounds of formal educational concerns. To make non-formal education meaningful, educational planners will have to extend the horizons of non-formal education to include aspects that are part of community life, and involve concerned departments and ministries in the formulation of curriculum and programme planning.

Planning Pre-requisites

Structural changes in the educational system in the five critical areas discussed cannot be made operational without careful planning and proper administrative arrangements. There is a well known poster in which a bird is flying high. The caption says: "I can, because I think I can." A deep urge and strong resolve are undoubtedly important but that is not enough. In the planning of radical reform in education, it is essential to know what is necessary and to adjust strategies accordingly. It is also important to identify prerequisites for successful implementation. The case studies are conscious of the fact that much of the responsibility for large-scale involvement would fall on the Government. Before introducing non-formal education programmes on a wide scale, it may be essential for national governments (or provincial governments) to follow the steps indicated below either sequentially or simultaneously :

i) Restate educational objectives : It needs to be acknowledged that so far educational opportunity, even at the primary level, remains confined to the privileged. The decision to extend that opportunity to the under-privileged and the poor would call for a clear government commitment. The introduction of non-formal education programmes on a wide scale is a political act inasmuch as it would undermine the existing monopoly on education. It will also not be possible to implement large-scale non-formal education programmes without support from government.

ii) Ensure participation : In societies which do not have a literate milieu, it is necessary to disseminate information. All sections of the community will need to be convinced about the need for non-formal education: the press, universities, and teachers' organisations. Even the parents of the children who would benefit from non-formal education may be influenced to think that non-formal education is inferior and offered to them, because they are poor. It would, therefore, be necessary to

create an environment in which the parents can assess the alternative and benefit from it. Dissemination of information is necessary to involve village youth so that they participate in the programme as instructors and motivators to mobilise the village community into participating actively in the programme.

iii) Realistically phased implementation : It would be rash to implement the non-formal education programme in a country or province without careful preparation. It is generally advisable to start on a small scale, learn from the experience in the first couple of years and then to rapidly expand the programme. It is also ordinarily advisable to begin where the chances of success are brightest and then, gradually, extend the programme to difficult areas.

iv) Focus on the most deprived : Even non-formal education programmes may leave out the most under-privileged. In the sub-continent girls are decidedly under-privileged, even amongst the privileged groups. Communities which live in hilly and tribal areas, and especially identified groups such as persons belonging to the scheduled castes in India, and the minorities, deserve special attention. The real test of the success of non-formal education is whether it reaches those who have so far been left out.

v) Review administrative structures : It would be impossible to implement non-formal education programmes unless the administrative system can be decentralised and made flexible. All successful programmes of non-formal education in countries other than those which are in the midst of socio-economic revolutionary change, are organised by voluntary organizations. People in government can seldom guarantee the decentralisation and flexibility needed for implementation of innovative programmes. When non-formal education programmes are taken up by government, it shall require decision-making at the lowest level, departure from established procedures, and the inculcation of a new creative spirit among the functionaries. A review of administrative structures and procedures should, therefore, be treated as a pre-requisite for the successful implementation of non-formal education programmes.

vi) Emphasise complementarity with formal system : There are several points of contact between activities of formal and non-formal education. Emphasis should be on their mutuality rather than on exclusiveness. Many of the children who go through non-formal elementary education may want to continue to study in the formal system. Such a move should be encouraged by granting scholarships and introducing the necessary flexibility in the formal system. It is also possible that the formal system may acquire the characteristics of non-formal education and the latter the objective of good formal education.

Making Non-formal Education Operational

Several aspects of how this could be done have already been detailed. However, for the sake of clarity and to emphasise the insights that have emerged from an analysis of the case studies, some important administrative aspects of implementation of non-formal education programmes on a large scale are given below :

i) Implementing agencies : There is a strong tradition of voluntary work in the sub-continent - of a religious as well as a secular nature. Generally, such organisations operate on a modest scale and in a limited geographical area. But they are strongly motivated groups. As Philip H. Coombs has noted :

> "... in recent years a growing number of voluntary organisations have begun to shift their emphasis from religion and limited social service to more fundamental developmental efforts." 14

The main role of voluntary organisations is innovation, experimentation and resource development. In a few cases they also effectively implement programmes in well defined geographic areas.

Viewed from the national perspective, however, most of the responsibility has to be that of the government. Education is already a concern of several ministries and departments (such as Agriculture, Labour and Community Development) and as many as possible should be encouraged to participate in the implementation of non-formal education programmes. Similarly, municipalities and local bodies operating in rural areas can take responsibility for non-formal education. It would be important to reorient the personnel concerned with implementation of non-formal education programmes in government and semi-government organisations.

ii) Community and parent participation : The most important variable in children's education is, perhaps, the interest, or the lack of it, of parents. Non-formal educational programmes which do not fully recognise this have little chance of success. In this connection, one may recall the important part-time education experiment launched by C. Rajagopalachari in 1938 in the state of Madras, India. His programme of part-time education failed because parents viewed it as an inferior programme which would keep their children at a disadvantage in comparison to urban children. On the other hand, we have the experience of cases included in this volume, where parents participate in decision-making and actually contribute to non-formal programmes. The Tanzanian and Indian experiences show that programmes of education of children of poor parents have the best chances of success if they are accompanied, or preceded by, effective programmes of parents' education.

Apart from parents, there should be participation of local youth, village leaders and other people in the community. The teacher in non-formal education will have to move the spirit of the school out of the confines of the classroom and involve the community in the running of the school, sometimes through local committees.

iii) Resource development : The development of curricula, preparation of instructional materials, training, and research have a most important place in all educational programmes. They do, however, depend on the nature of programme intended to be run. In many cases, the Government programmes may simply be part-time education programmes as in Madhya Pradesh, India. The programme completes the five-year primary education course in two to three years. In such cases it may be best to use curricula and instructional material used in formal schools. Even here the curriculum should include areas of special interest to the pupils. In innovative programmes, the agencies concerned would design suitable curriculum and instructional materials, often with the participation of the teachers and sometimes with the learners themselves.

Training is critical for the teachers in non-formal education programmes. Those with experience of such programmes have recommended short duration pre-service training, followed by counselling by supervisors, and frequent meetings among the instructors and between instructors and supervisors for continuing education. Intensive training programmes have to be organised for supervisors and administrative personnel. The training programmes themselves should ideally be non-formal, to help the teachers and other participants acquaint themselves with methods they have to follow with their pupils.

Suitable agencies will also have to be identified for resource development. BEERI of the Government of Bangladesh is an organisation specifically set up for this purpose. There may be a need to decentralise the activities of BEERI to different regions of that country. India's National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) may have to serve the needs of non-formal education as well. Each country must decide whether it would prefer to create a wing for non-formal education within the institution created to provide resource support to formal education programmes, or whether there should be separate organisations for non-formal education programmes. It is strongly felt that the objectives of non-formal education would be served only by creating flexible and small resource development organisations which would co-ordinate the vast resources available in the community rather than having huge unmanageable institutions. Voluntary agencies which have credibility among other implementing agencies should be encouraged to organise resource support at the local level.

iv) Supervision : The type of supervision that exists in primary schools will not do for non-formal education programmes (they have not been effective for the formal system either). In the selection of field level supervisory personnel too, academic qualifications are not so important, although a minimum level (say matriculation) should be insisted upon. The supervisors in non-formal education programmes should be able to move from village to village and work with the village community, the instructors and the learners. Therefore, selection, training and motivation of these field workers is crucial. The competence, credibility and effectiveness of instructors depends to a great degree on the kind of support the supervisors are able to give them.

The design of the supervisory system in non-formal education should give numerical adequacy some special attention. In India and Bangladesh, the supervisors of primary schools seldom do what is expected of them because the task assigned to them is unmanageable. They are given a number of additional administrative chores. Non-formal education programmes could be in clusters of not more than 20 centres under the charge of a supervisor who lives in the area, and can visit each centre at least once a month. The supervisor should not be expected to write long inspection notes. He should work with the instructor and, where necessary, co-ordinate the work in the area.

v) Financing of non-formal programmes and cost-effectiveness : The basic economic rationale for non-formal education is that, in comparison to formal education, the investment in it is likely to have a much better return. Without going into the technicalities of economics of non-formal education, it would be necessary to refer to a few major issues. Studies made in this area by Manzoor Ahmed, [15] and T. Majumdar and M S Adiseshiah [16] have shown the validity of investment in non-formal education, not only in comparison to school education, but indeed in comparison to other investment choices available to economic planners.

The desirable elements of cost-effectiveness in non-formal education is optimum retention of learners and a stress on the quality of the programme. The principal indicators of internal inefficiency of primary education are : (i) the big drop-out rate, and (ii) insufficient achievement for self-reliant learning upon completion of the primary stage. Non-formal education is designed to effectively counter the main reason for drop-out. We have, however, to persist with emphasis on the quality of the programme, including achievement of literacy and numeracy skills, also to generate capability amongst the learners to deal more effectively with their environment and to bring about an overall improvement in their socio-economic condition. It is this that would determine the cost-effectiveness of the programmes of non-formal education and justify the investment in them.

vi) Monitoring of non-formal programmes : The traditional model of evaluation and monitoring, which views evaluation as the last activity in a cycle which begins with planning and then has implementation and evaluation, is not suitable for non-formal education. It suffers from numerous weaknesses, chief amongst which is that it permanently serves as a tool of measurement, and only rarely of improvement. In such a system, the barriers and shortcomings which are observed at the time of evaluation are used mostly to apportion blame, rather than for correcting the way the programme is run. On the other hand, if evaluation is to be a tool of self-evaluation and learning, it has to build into itself a mechanism for appraisal, feedback, diagnosis and remedial action at all stages of a project or programme including planning, implementation and assimilation. In specific terms, this changed perspective in monitoring non-formal education programmes implies that those responsible for planning and implementation of such programmes provide for : (a) appraisal at the stage of the existing situation, i.e. when the programmes of non-formal education are being planned; (b) evaluation of material inputs as well as non-material inputs at the

commencement of the programme; (c) careful checking of the management as well as the pedagogical processes; and (d) paying enough attention to the evaluation results, the immediate learning outcomes as well as the long range impact on the learners and the community.

As far as the flow of information for monitoring is concerned (i) essential information should be collected; (ii) channels through which information pass should be kept to the minimum; and (iii) stress should be laid on feedback so that a two way channel of communication is established.

Summing Up

In this introduction an attempt has been made to draw some broad conclusions from an analysis of the case studies included in this volume. Details of the process of effective planning at the project level have been highlighted. The methods used have subsequently been synthesised and conclusions have been drawn on the pre-requisites for planning of such programmes by Government. The issues that have been focused upon for the attention of administrators and educational planners derive essentially from the case studies, but also take note of other important contemporary happenings in the field of non-formal education in the sub-continent.

It is hoped that the case studies have succeeded in presenting the stages in the process of planning, drawing general lessons from successful experiences in non-formal elementary education and raising major issues for debate; and that the conceptual clarity necessary for planning and implementation has been set out.

These case studies have all been undertaken by private agencies. They represent an interesting cross-section of communities in the sub-continent and describe what actually happens when a motivated individual or group takes serious cognizance of a problem. The success of these projects lies in their closeness to the community they serve. The case studies should not be looked on necessarily as models for replication. The usefulness of an innovation in non-formal education lies in provoking and stimulating thought and action. The multiplication of such projects and the growth of a movement in non-formal education, therefore, depends upon the ability of Governments to facilitate more of such activities and even more importantly, to sustain them.

Aruna Roy

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ACTION RESEARCH ON UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION - AN INDIAN INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION (POONA) PROJECT

Chitra Naik

The National Perspective

In India, national leaders demanded enforcement of compulsory primary education as far back as 1881, drawing their inspiration from the fact of Britain's having done so in 1870. However, it was only after independence that universalisation of primary education was included in policies for national reconstruction. Article 45 of the Directive Principles of the Indian Constitution required universal primary education for the age group 6-14, by the year 1960. But the changing priorities of national concerns from one Five-Year Plan to another made it impossible for primary education to get its constitutionally directed high priority.

The Indian Education Commission (1964-66) took up the issue afresh and strongly argued the case for universal primary education in relation to development. Subsequently, the Central Advisory Board of Education debated the problem. While recognising such hurdles as rural poverty, socio-cultural constraints and population increases, it nevertheless recommended rapid universalisation of primary education. Part-time non-formal primary education was accepted as a support programme and "full-time primary education if possible and part-time education, if necessary", became the watchword for achieving universalisation.

A review of education when preparing India's Sixth Five-Year Plan shows that formal primary education facilities have substantially increased and primary schools are available to 95 per cent of the population within the walking distance of the 6-11 age group. Nearly 85 per cent of children in this age group are on the rolls in classes I-IV (or V in some States). But it also revealed that of the children enrolled in class I, only about one-third reach class V, in spite of the availability of schooling facilities. Besides, the enrolment in class I contains a large proportion of under-age and over-age pupils who tend to drop out early. Enrolment figures are usually found to be inflated, for the class size determines the appointment and continuance of teachers. And working back, it is seen that the figures are overestimated. Nearly 60 per cent of children of school-going age are from the poor and disadvantaged class, and girls particularly stay out of school. The reasons for dropping out are poverty, social custom and unattractive and irrelevant instruction. From age seven onwards, poor children are busy the whole day long assisting their parents in agriculture and other rural tasks or are required to earn a living for themselves. Girls have to do household work and take care of children, when women go out to work as labourers. These

circumstances make non-formal part-time education a worthwhile solution to the problem besetting universalisation. It is also generally conceded that while developing a non-formal channel of primary education, the formal primary school would have to be helped to function better. The two should be mutually supportive devices in the interests of universalisation of primary education.

In most States, part-time primary classes for the 6-11 and 9-14 age groups have been started under advice from the Ministry of Education of the Government of India. These are conducted either in the afternoon or in the evening by a professional primary teacher drawn from the local full-time primary school. He is paid an honorarium of Rs. 50 per month. The class size is thirty pupils. The pattern of working days, vacations and holidays is, by and large, the same as that of the full-time school. The primary curriculum of four years is expected to be condensed into two years. Generally, the curriculum, textbooks and the teaching methods used for the part-time classes are not very different from those in a full-time school. However, the need for research and experimentation in non-formal primary education has been recognised as there are no precedents for planning and organising such a programme on a large scale.

The Institute and its Projects

The action research project on universal primary education has been launched by the Indian Institute of Education of which R.V. Parulekar and J.P. Naik, both firm believers in mass education, were the founders. The present action research project was conceived by J.P. Naik in 1978 as a major research project of the Institute affiliated to Poona and Bombay Universities for postgraduate teaching and research in education, with an interdisciplinary approach. Developing non-formal education rather than intervening directly in the formal system is part of the Institute's policy. Yet, improving the performance of the formal system at all levels, so as to render it more responsive to the needs of the disadvantaged sections of society, is also within the scope of its concerns. It is against this background that the Institute has undertaken a five year action research project on universal primary education (1979-83), in five selected rural areas of the Poona District (Maharashtra). Finding ways of stimulating and training rural communities to develop comprehensive local education plans is the ultimate aim of this experiment. Non-formal education for the age group 9-14 is the first step towards the main goal. It would cover, along with non-formal primary education, (a) improving the formal primary schools in the project area, (b) education for better health and environment, (c) application of science to everyday life, (d) adult literacy and continuation education, and (e) education for rural development, in general.

The action research project started in 1979 may run a year or so beyond its specified time limit and would be completed in 1984, when its final comprehensive report will be prepared.

Objectives

The objectives of the project are :

(a) to strive to provide universal primary education for children in the age group 6-14 in selected rural areas of the Poona district, Maharashtra State;

(b) to strive to improve the quality of education in the primary schools in selected areas and to relate it more closely to the life and needs of the rural children and to rural development;

(c) to conduct experiments in urban slums with a view to evolving a similar programme for universalisation of primary education, to improve its quality and to make it more relevant to the life and needs of the slum children (this was explored in 1979 but postponed so as to be able to concentrate on the rural programme);

(d) to produce improved educational materials for primary education in the rural areas and in urban slums;

(e) to devise techniques and to produce related materials for the effective training of teachers of part-time and full-time primary schools; and

(f) to devise more effective techniques of supervision.

The Project Area and Organisation

The project decided to focus on five selected rural areas in Poona district, representing five different types of agro-climatic conditions, in all having a population of about 125,000 spread over roughly 100 villages and 80 habitations. The area types selected were drought prone; hilly with heavy rainfall; hilly and semi-tribal; fairly well-irrigated but not advanced; and well irrigated and semi-industrial.

It is assumed that the occupational patterns of the poor families and non-attending children in these areas would vary to some extent and must be taken into account to formulate area-wide plans for the universalisation of primary education. A main centre of operation has been selected in each area, where a team of one research officer and two project assistants is stationed. These are: Pabal, Panshet, Shinoli, Khed Shivapur and Katewadi - all beyond the suburban belt of Poona city, the nearest being 25 kilometres and the farthest being about 100 kilometres. A base-line survey conducted in early 1979 showed that the selected areas had 185 multi-teacher primary schools and 97 single teacher schools. The number of enrolled pupils (6-14 age group) was 19,635 and that of non-school going children of the same age group was estimated at 19,374. A household survey was conducted to investigate the economic and educational status of the families of out-of-school children and to prepare lists of illiterate children in the 9-14 age

group for enrolment in part-time classes. A survey of primary schools was also conducted in order to obtain a profile of the teachers and the conditions in Standard I, with a view to (a) organising teacher orientation for making the full-time school more effective and (b) reducing drop-outs from Standard I. This programme was planned to follow some experiences of conducting part-time classes and will begin towards the middle of 1982.

Organisation of Part-Time Classes

The survey showed that 7 to 10 p.m. is the most convenient time for holding classes.

The procedures for the establishment and conduct of the classes were determined as follows:

(a) Involvement of the Community

(i) The accommodation should be provided by the community, (ii) if possible, the community should arrange for lighting also, (iii) a special committee of villagers should be appointed for helping the project staff with the organisation and supervision of the classes, (iv) teaching resources should be drawn from the community and, as far as possible, non-formal teaching should be 'deprofessionalised', (v) teachers should be workers during the day, in order to establish a status equality with the pupils, (vi) the community should draw up lists of likely candidates for the position of teachers, participate in their recruitment, and help evaluate their work, thus paving the way for 'social control' of primary education.

(b) Class Organisation

(i) The classes would function for about 300 days in the year, the holidays and vacations determined by each class according to its situational needs, (ii) the class size would be restricted to twenty pupils, for better individual attention, (iii) studies of the level of Standard IV, with a modified curriculum, would be attempted in two years, but the class will be ungraded, (iv) in the first year, emphasis would be placed on breaking the illiteracy barrier, (v) nearly three-fourths of the knowledge content would be transmitted by the teacher orally, (vi) the curriculum, as well as other topics of interest to the pupils and the community would be transmitted with the help of about 1000-1200 easy-to-grasp folders and booklets, so that once the illiteracy barrier is broken, the pupils may select any reading material according to their interests and pace of learning, (vii) the principle of mastery learning would be observed, (viii) self-learning would be emphasised, (ix) useful aspects of local tradition would be combined with modern learning, (x) the attitudes of scientific enquiry, co-operation, self-confidence and self-reliance would be inculcated, (xi) the class would be more of a club than a school, and (xii) for pupils wishing to take the formal Standard IV

examination, bridging courses would be provided.

Strategies

It was decided to enrol only illiterate children of the 9-13 age group, in batches of about 100 classes per year. Preparations for starting the first batch were completed in 1979. These included, (a) appointment of project staff, (b) discussions with the Zilla Parishad (District Development Council) for mutual collaboration, (c) appointment of Advisory Committees, (d) contact with communities, (e) organisation of meetings of local primary teachers in order to acquaint them with the project so as to involve them in base-line surveys and establishment of part-time classes, (f) conduct of a base-line survey, (g) orientation of project staff, (h) preparation of a tentative curriculum and production of teaching and learning materials, (i) decision on the content and techniques of teacher training and (j) selection of teachers.

The formal inauguration of the project took place in February 1979. A mass meeting was organised in one of the project areas where the State Chief Minister and the Education Minister explained the need for part-time, non-formal primary education. Later, a similar meeting, organised in another project area, was addressed by the President of the Zilla Parishad and the local leaders. Inaugurations, on a smaller scale, were held in the three remaining areas. Before undertaking teacher training, it was felt that we needed to gain first-hand experience of the organisation of part-time classes. With this in view, three pilot classes to be conducted personally by the field staff, for example the research officer and two project assistants, were started in October 1979.

Recruitment of Project Staff

While research officers were recruited by advertisement, project assistants were selected from unemployed graduates in the project area. At the Institute, the main responsibility for the project was undertaken by the Project Adviser and Project Director. They put together a team of Project Officer (Administration), Training Officer, Material Production Officer and a Research Assistant. It was thought useful to create an extra post of Deputy Education Officer in the Poona Zilla Parishad, fully paid by the Institute, but under the control of the Education Officer of the district, in order to establish a close liaison with the District Administration of primary education. After a year, however, this post was abolished as the project staff had established a good working relationship with the Education Officer and the Extension Officers (Education) in whose 'beats' the project was included.

Recruitment of Teachers

The teachers were selected by a joint panel of project staff and village leaders. The honorarium for teachers was fixed at the same rate as for teachers of government part-time classes, i.e. Rs. 50 per month.

The majority of the teachers (46) were engaged in agriculture. Ten men were labourers. Of the women, one was a primary teacher, two Balwadi

(pre-primary and creche) teachers, and the remainder were housewives, of whom two did some tailoring and needlework as a spare time occupation. As regards educational levels, the majority of teachers had studied up to Standard VII and also only twenty-seven were below Standard VII. Among these, fourteen were women.

Nearly sixty per cent of the teachers belonged to the 'advanced' castes. The remainder consisted of 'other backward classes', scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. One woman teacher came from a nomadic tribe. All the teachers lived in their own houses or huts, as the case may be. An annual household income of more than Rs. 5,000 was reported by only two teachers. The bulk of them had incomes ranging between Rs. 1,000 to 3,000. None from the scheduled castes and tribes had an income of over Rs. 1,000. However, the reliability of the income reported by the teachers could not be checked. It was obvious that the additional income of Rs. 600 per annum by part-time teaching was welcome to them. Besides, they seemed to be happy with the 'white collar' status of the teaching job as it enhanced their prestige in the community.

Starting the Classes

By the end of January 1980, it was possible to start 90 classes. Though there was a demand for continuing education for semi-literate drop-outs, the villagers were requested to allow the project to postpone that programme. This was reluctantly agreed to. The intention of the project, its duration, organisation, and the proposed curriculum and teaching techniques were explained to the community leaders and to most of the parents. The difference between a government 'scheme' and a 'research project' was pointedly brought out in these discussions in order to enable the community to understand that it was a full participant in this pioneering action research. The pupils also were given an idea of the learning programme and of the research project in which they had become participants.

In most places, the local community readily agreed to provide rent-free accommodation. In two semi-tribal hamlets, even special sheds were constructed. For one of these, the Sarpanch (President of the Village) donated the tiles he had purchased for repairing the roof of his own house. The classes began to meet in 34 school rooms, 16 teachers' houses, 14 temples, 13 private homes, 4 panchayat offices and other miscellaneous places like cattle sheds and dharmashalas (free rest-houses).

Enrolment

The number of pupils enrolled was 1434 of whom 1050 were girls and 384 boys. Ten classes enrolled only girls and one class only boys. The remainder were mixed classes where girls predominated. There were no noticeable reservations on the part of parents towards sending girls to classes looked after by men teachers. In a short while, the number of classes was reduced to 86 as some classes had to be amalgamated for reasons of low attendance or convenience of location.

Project Staff - Training and Development

Except for the Project Adviser and Project Director, none of the project staff possessed any previous research training or experience. But their experience of administration or teaching in the rural areas was considered as an important basic qualification. A Block Development Officer who had initially been a teacher and educator in a rural primary training college and also Extension Officer (Education) was appointed Project Officer. Coming from a rural family of moderate means, he was well aware of the problems and needs of the local rural society. His detailed knowledge of the project areas and of rural development schemes was seen as an asset. The Training Officer who was a woman, had been a teacher educator for pre-school teachers. Since the problem of universalisation largely concerns girls, the presence of a woman training officer was expected to reassure the parents that the interest of their wards was in safe hands. The monitoring and evaluation officer had taught in a Rural Institute and possessed extensive experience in the organisation and evaluation of rural co-operatives. The arrangements for materials production were entrusted to a staff member of the Institute's State Resources Centre for non-formal education. Along with the Project Director, he was to plan, produce and edit materials prepared by the staff and several subject experts and writers from outside the Institute.

Initial and current orientation of project staff was undertaken by the Project Adviser and the Project Director. Scheduled and unscheduled discussion meetings were held for this purpose. The topics covered in the first two years were numerous. The following may be mentioned, to give an idea of the theoretical and practical aspects of staff development: (a) Problems of universal primary education; (b) Methods of action research and relating them to the problems of universal primary education; (c) Maintenance and use of research records such as teachers' daily diaries, pupil record cards, class records, class visit reports of the field staff, diaries of field staff, and analysis and consolidation of area reports; (d) Preparation of survey schedules, conducting focused surveys, analysis and consolidation of data; (e) Analysis of the existing primary curriculum, preparing locally relevant curriculum units and materials; (f) Techniques of teaching reading and techniques of imparting numeracy; (g) Techniques of developing observation and reasoning in the teachers and pupils; (h) Preparation and use of teaching materials in the rural circumstances; (i) Physiological and psychological aspects of learning in a situation of poverty and social handicaps; (j) Methods of training non-professionals to be part-time teachers; (k) Concept of mastery learning; (l) Problems of

the pupils' differential rates of learning; (m) Preparation of teaching aids and equipment to suit local conditions, (n) Development of techniques of supervision for non-formal classes and finally the training and development of field staff.

In all, ten training camps were held at Poona for discussions with the field staff. The field staff gave a systematic feedback on different aspects of the action planned on the basis of daily diaries and collective reports on each area. New ideas, strategies and programmes were developed by the whole group. They were trained to gradually take over as trainers of the teachers of part-time classes. In addition to the theory and practice of non-formal primary education, they were required to learn a few skills which they in turn could transmit to teachers. These consisted of simple yogasanas, special songs, stories to be told, preparation of word cards, sentence cards and number games, and designing learning units in local history, geography and science. They were also required to collect local dialect vocabularies, folk songs, folklore and traditional tales, with a view to using them for practice reading.

The research officers and project assistants whose ages ranged between twenty-five and forty, were encouraged to read further for the M.A. Degree (External) of the University of Poona, mainly opting for Economics, Sociology and Political Science. Those who held good Master's degrees were encouraged to undertake Ph.D work. A set of textbooks required for these courses has been provided in the Institute's library.

Training of Teachers

The training of teachers is arranged in school rooms, temples, or any such place made available by the community. The teachers walk to the area headquarters and attend training from 11 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. for five days, every six weeks; they return to their respective villages in the evening and teach under the supervision of one or two members of the project staff. On training days an allowance of Rs. 7 per day is paid to each teacher to reimburse loss of wages.

The objectives of training are: (a) to improve the education level of the teachers; (b) to help them acquire an understanding of the problem of universal primary education; (c) to help them learn the skills of conducting non-formal primary classes;(d) to sensitise them to the importance of studying the educational problems of the community as part of its development needs; (e) to help them internalise the values inherent in the Indian Constitution, and (f) to create in them a spirit of enquiry and innovation. It is recognised that teacher socialisation of the right kind is the pre-requisite of pupil socialisation.

Training is conducted through group work in which the trainers and trainees discuss problems and prepare materials. It is a non-authoritarian and participatory process of teaching and learning, which helps build up self-confidence and self-esteem of the trainees in their new

identity as agents of education and social change. They prepare improvised learning materials for language and number, write out their work plans and learn to write reports from a research point of view. Making entries on the pupils' progress cards, finding out levels of pupil achievement and causes of non-attendance are also important parts of their training, emphasising critical reflection on the socio-economic problems of the rural communities. Acquisition of teaching skills is a process closely related to social awareness.

A circulating library is organised for them in each project area. It contains select Marathi literature and informative books. One Marathi science journal and one popular children's journal are also supplied through this circulating library system. The training material consists of a series of cyclostyled notes on various aspects of the curriculum and the process of learning. A series of 'instruction sheets' and 'guide books' for teachers of non-formal classes is now emerging out of this exercise.

The Curriculum

The curriculum of the part-time classes takes into consideration the knowledge content which figures in the primary curriculum and recommendations of Government of India committees on curriculum revision. A unit analysis of these curricula facilitates selection of relevant units for the part-time classes. Some new units are also added. However, the units are not treated as bits of a subject-wise curricular structure, but as self-contained items of information which the learner may arrange in his own way. History, geography and science may thus merge into one another. All studies are related to the environment and human affairs. Even language and numbers are not treated in isolation from the day to day transactions or explorations of new facets of life. Reasoning and aesthetic sensitivity are sought to be developed through all activities and studies, and particularly so from an observation of the social and physical environment. Emphasis is placed on stories, songs, and simple yogasanas, by way of relaxation exercises and club activities. The awareness of basic human values and community consciousness pervades the entire curriculum, sets of materials, stories and especially the songs. The conceptual specialities of the curriculum are reflected in class arrangement, pupil/teacher relationship, peer group activities and relationship between the class and the teacher and the class and the community.

An example of how this interweaving of various curricular units is attempted may be cited here. The teacher and the pupils decide to prepare an informative booklet on their village. For this, they study its physical features, crops, flora and fauna, historical traditions and landmarks, the name of the village, its folklore, folk tales, local religious beliefs, superstitions, and above all, the manner in which the village needs to be improved. In this exercise language, measurement, history, geography, health, science, reasoning, appreciation of nature and of the design of things, and many other facets of knowledge, attitudes, interests and values are covered in an effortless manner. The awareness of the need of the community and the possible future of the village is built up in the course of such an

exercise. History becomes real on Independence Day, Republic Day and Gandhi Jayanti when pupils put up plays, take out processions and organise meetings and elocution competitions in co-operation with the formal primary school and other organisations in the community.

Equipment and Teaching Aids

In the project areas, electricity has reached only a few villages and hamlets. In most of the part-time classes, kerosene lanterns provide the light. Four lanterns are supplied to each class which has about twenty pupils enrolled. The pupils are divided into four groups for interactive learning. Each group sits around one lantern. Even in the few places where electricity is available, learning is organised by the group work method. For prayers, stories, games and songs, the teacher and pupils sit face to face on the floor, forming a circle.

The nature of accommodation and lighting makes traditional classroom equipment like wall charts, wall blackboards and stand blackboards unsuitable. Therefore, each class has been supplied with one small blackboard which can circulate from group to group. A folding Khadigraph (flannel graph) having two flaps of foolscap size and with pockets for holding cards, has been specially designed. A set of wooden cut-outs of all the letters of the alphabet, vowel signs, and numbers is provided to each class. A canvas bag has been designed to hold all the teaching equipment, including the blackboard. The teacher can store and carry equipment in this bag even during heavy rains. The bag can be hung from a peg in the teacher's house and takes up no floor space. All this is low cost material designed by the project staff to meet the needs of non-formal, part-time primary education in the rural environment.

Teaching and Learning Materials

The preparation of teaching and learning materials and evolving techniques of instruction and evaluation is an integrated process. Materials are intended to promote as much self study as possible and facilitate learning games and peer group interaction. Sets of cards provide basic literacy and numeracy materials. These are produced, edited and tested co-operatively through the participation of the entire project staff and teachers. Preparation of supplementary materials based on curriculum units and on the observable reading interest of pupils is assigned to several writers and teachers outside the project. Suitable materials from different publications are also adapted.

Feedback from the pupils is considered to be an integral part of the process of material production. A primer, profusely illustrated, was at first prepared under the impression that the 'primer and slate' would be expected by the rural pupils as symbols of entry into primary education. There was serious debate among the project staff about the desirability of such a primer when more effective ways could be pursued to teach language. Finally, the feedback on the primer showed that some typically urban concepts and words had crept into it and could not be grasped by the pupils. The pupils did not care much for

pictures either. It was then substituted by three sets of reading cards based on words and sentences with a local flavour. This material was received well by both teachers and pupils. With the help of the cards, learning games became easy and the pupils could also learn at their own pace. Each class was provided with three sets of cards, which could circulate from group to group. All learning aids, even slates, were made class property. These were distributed to pupils when class began and put back systematically before they left. Nothing was taken home. Everything was to be used very carefully as it belonged to the whole class. Besides, the pupils were not given any 'homework' in the usual sense. Instead, they were asked to observe natural phenomena, vegetation, birds, animals, insects, rocks and soil, sources of water and food and report their experiences to the class. They were also encouraged to collect specimens of different objects. The class collection was meant to be studied by the teacher and pupils for classifying and describing its contents. This constituted an exercise in enquiry and reasoning. Language practice and number exercises were often based on such collections. The pupils also made toys and figurines from clay, did drawing and handwork, for the latter using local materials like straw, nuts and seeds.

Teaching Methods and Learner Evaluation

Teaching methods are based on the principle of self-learning. The men teachers are called Bhau (brother) and women teachers Tai (sister) in order to establish an informal, non-authoritarian relationship between the teachers and the taught. The teacher is to be looked upon as an adult brother or sister who plays the roles of stimulator, guide and co-ordinator of learning activities and becomes an accepted arbitrator in the disputes common among immature peer groups. Being free from continuous teaching in class, the teacher finds time to observe each pupil and record his or her progress carefully in the daily diary and the progress card. Not being required to talk all the time or engage in the exhausting question and answer recitation common in formal schools, the teacher remains relaxed and is alert to the guidance and needs of different pupils. While learning with the help of cards the pupils help one another in testing the expected acquisition of literacy and numeracy. In this progress, the pupils constantly interchange the roles of the tutor and the taught but the teacher is always acknowledged as their guide and referee.

The project views evaluation as a continuous process which does not classify pupils into the 'pass' and 'fail' categories. However, teachers and parents were looking forward to a periodical examination. They felt that this would make the pupils pay better attention to their studies. The suggestion was accepted but an innovative way was found to adjust it to the learning system. It was decided to call the teachers and pupils from a number of classes to a suitable central village for participating in a Bal Jatra, that is, children's fair, where along with amusement, the pupils would engage in guided self-evaluation. The project staff prepared evaluation tools, evaluation records and instructions for teachers and pupils. The co-operation of selected villages was sought for organising the Bal Jatra. They

made arrangements for games, sports, clean drinking water, and a happy and festive atmosphere. Pupils came to the Bal Jatra in small processions, singing a cadre song especially written for them. For half the day they played, sang group songs and listened to stories told by the teachers and project staff. In the afternoon, they broke into small groups in order to test themselves with graded evaluation tools for literacy and numeracy. They also demonstrated skills in telling stories, answering a quiz, and singing songs. The performance of each pupil was observed by a pair of 'external' teachers, who carefully filled an evaluation sheet, according to instructions therein.

In the Bal Jatra of June 1980 the tests were directed mainly towards finding out how many pupils had crossed the illiteracy barrier. In the second Bal Jatra held in December 1980, it was decided to find out how many pupils could read fluently, how many came close to the fluency level and how many still had reading difficulties. The graded evaluation material covered five steps leading to fluent reading. Similar materials were prepared for numeracy based on six graded steps. It was found that 28.85 per cent of children could read any given material fluently. The percentage of those who read 'well', but did not reach the 'fluency' level was 24.29. Cumulatively, therefore, 53.14 per cent of pupils had adequately mastered reading skills in about one year. However, 46.86 per cent of pupils managed to read words with fair ease but stumbled on sentences. These pupils were placed in the 'barely literate' category. The fourth category consisted of 170 pupils who were still struggling with the alphabet.

As regards numeracy, about 51 per cent of pupils had mastered addition and subtraction, arrangements of sets, and actual counting of objects up to fifty. About 26 per cent had proceeded beyond this stage. Most of the pupils could do simple mental arithmetic connected with daily transactions.

Discipline

The discipline of the pupils both in the Bal Jatra and in classes has been extraordinarily good. The part-time classes have no bells either to call the pupils or to dismiss class. Pupils come mostly in groups. When they finish the day's work they go home for a wash and a quick meal, collect one another and come to the class. In the beginning, each class was provided with a bucket, napkins, a small mirror and combs to help the pupils to spruce themselves up before class began. After some time, this arrangement became superfluous since the pupils soon learnt to tidy themselves up at home. If there are any pupils who are afraid of the dark or have to be encouraged to attend the class, the teacher makes a round of the village to collect them. The fear of ghosts and wild animals is widely prevalent. Crossing streams and walking through dark patches of the jungle at night become easier in groups.

The equipment in the class and Bal Jatra appears to be safe. In the first Bal Jatra a few pupils were tempted to pocket coloured crayons. But the staff dealt with such incidents tactfully by making all articles the property of the user groups and making them responsible for their safety.

The manners and etiquette which the pupils have absorbed surprise many an outsider. They greet everyone they meet, young or old, known or unknown. They speak boldly, take part in discussions, play and laugh but control the classes themselves. Taking out teaching and learning materials and putting them back systematically is their job. Very few slates have been damaged, though the cards are now soiled and books are slightly frayed at the edges. But there has been hardly any loss of materials.

The relationship with teachers has also been good. It was only in one class that the villagers found a teacher taking undue interest in one of the older girls. They managed the situation quietly by finding another teacher. Community control and the sense of responsibility which working children appear to possess seem to be important factors in the maintenance of good discipline.

Micro Studies

Four micro studies were carried out as an integral part of action research. These were: (a) profile of the pupils, (b) profile of the teachers, (c) causes for dropping out from the part-time classes, and (d) motivation for the enrolment of girls. Some interesting points from the studies are given below:

(a) Profile of pupils

The 1434 pupils enrolled in the first batch ('A' batch) came from 1213 families. Nearly 55 per cent of families were below the poverty line. The main occupation of parents was agriculture and allied labour, labour on construction works and artisanship. As regards education levels, only 22 parents had gone beyond the primary stage. Among the mothers, only 93 had been to a primary school. While the father was illiterate in the case of 919 pupils, the mother was illiterate in 1251 cases. In the total enrolment, pupils between the ages of 9 and 13 predominated. Of the total number of enrolled pupils, only 71 boys and 103 girls had been to school earlier, but dropped out before acquiring literacy. As many as 42 had left from Standards III and IV. The majority had left from Standards I and II.

(b) Profile of teachers

Apart from the low level of education and economic conditions of the part-time teachers already referred to, it was noticed that women teachers were hard to find. Also, in the interior villages and hamlets, it was difficult to find even 10 per cent of adults who had completed primary education up to Standard VII. Some of the classes where pupils had willingly enrolled remained without teachers and had to be closed.

(c) Drop-outs

By December 1981, there were 439 cases of irregular or non-attendance in the 'A' batch. Among these 320 were girls.

Migration accounted for 45 girls and 43 boys. While 49 pupils (40 girls and 9 boys) left because their age exceeded 14 years, 95 pupils (93 girls and 2 boys) left to get married. Overwork restrained 49 girls and 6 boys. Reluctance of parents was responsible in 42 cases (35 girls and 7 boys). There were 25 transfers to formal schools, (12 boys and 13 girls). Ten boys were in bonded labour and their employers were unwilling to send them to the classes. A further detailed study of non-attendance is being made. The custom of early marriage of girls around the age of 12-14 is still widely prevalent in the rural areas. In the case of girls, therefore, the constitutional directive of universal primary education for the 5-14 age group seems to be difficult to achieve. Very few girls can hope to remain without marriage and to attend school after the age of 12 or 13, though the legal age for marriage for girls is now 18. These cases go unnoticed because registration of marriages is not yet systematically enforced.

(d) Motivation for enrolment of girls

In this project, it has been decided that rather than offer extrinsic incentives for enrolment and attendance, a search should be made for intrinsic motivations within the environment and circumstances of pupils. That is why even free books and slates are not provided individually as personal possessions. In spite of this, the enrolment, particularly of girls, has been surprisingly large. Motiviation for enrolment and attendance was investigated through a sample survey. Responses of parents and pupils were canvassed separately and compared. The parents emphasised the utility of part-time education for helping the girls to keep accounts, read letters and receipts and similar documents, and generally to manage day to day affairs. They also felt that a girl should usefully spend her evenings and the part-time classes offered an opportunity for this. A few parents hoped that the acquisition of some education by their daughters may help them in finding educated sons-in-law. Pupils had slightly different viewpoints. They appreciated the help they would get for keeping accounts, writing letters, but they also said that when young they used to feel unhappy at not being able to attend school and that part-time classes had now given them a chance they had missed and they were certainly happy to use it.

Impact on the Community and the Zilla Parishad

As the project progressed, members of the community began to take an increasing interest in the classes. Some insisted that the pupils should be punished if they did not learn properly. Others suggested memorisation as an effective way of learning. The project staff held several discussions to explain the techniques used in the classes to stimulate self-learning and self-discipline. However, it was only after the good performance of the pupils in the Bal Jatra that the villagers were impressed with the new methods which had at first appeared strange. Besides, on the Independence Day and Republic Day the pupils, especially girls made speeches and put on plays. The leadership taken by girls

was an unusual but gratifying spectacle for their parents and the community. It was admitted that the pupils had become brighter and bold. After this, community support began to come forth in small ways. Apart from free accommodation, some villages provided free lighting. In two places, the local youth groups gave some books and equipment. The transfer of a few pupils to Standard III of the full-time primary school also became a point of appreciation. In some villages, teachers of the full-time schools willingly collaborated with the teachers of the part-time classes in organising festivals, national days, and Bal Jatra. Some teachers requested to be allowed to use the reading materials of the project as these had proved effective for beginning reading. The songs especially written and set to tune for the part-time classes became popular in the full-time primary schools also. In several villages the local leaders have begun to raise questions about the follow-up of part-time education and some have come forward with suggestions for non-formal "post primary" education.

The Zilla Parishad has been not only co-operative but has begun to use the new learning materials for its own non-formal classes. A programme for training the Zilla Parishad teachers to use these materials and in general to conduct part-time classes, was held in collaboration with the Institute.

Second Phase - 1981

A process of analysis of the project as it developed in 1980 indicated a need for some change in teaching and learning materials and organisation of teacher training. A different approach was, therefore, adopted for the preparation of literacy and numeracy materials for the new batch 'B.' It was also decided to decentralise teacher training to the extent possible. The second batch of classes was to start in August. This time the communities were involved in the enrolment in this programme much more than in the first batch. Lists of prospective pupils were prepared and checked with the help of primary teachers and members of the community. Since only illiterate pupils were to be enrolled, tests were organised for pupils from clusters of villages. Dates for the tests were announced by the village crier. From the experience gained in the previous year, it was decided to enrol children of the 8+ to 12+ age group, calculating that the older pupils would be reaching the age of 14 years by the time they completed the course in part-time classes. Teachers of the 'A' batch assisted the project staff in testing the children who came for admission. The Gram Panchayats (village councils) in most places gave the necessary facilities. In all 1622 pupils were selected. Of these 1257 were girls and 365 boys. Occupation-wise the break-up of the pupils was as follows: labourers - 202, care of livestock - 791, household work - 560, farming - 42, bonded labour - 5. The remaining 20 pupils did miscellaneous jobs. One pupil frankly recorded 'begging' as his occupation. Though 108 classes were demanded by the villages concerned, 100 were finally started. The recruitment and orientation of teachers followed the previous year's pattern. However, more training responsibility was given to the field staff, for instance the research officer and project assistants. The question of establishing village education committees was again taken up. In all 39 commit-

tees were established. For the present they have agreed to the following functions: (a) arranging accommodation for the classes; (b) repairs to or construction of accommodation; (c) provision of electricity or kerosene; (d) giving books and equipment; (e) providing clean drinking water, accommodation and other facilities for the children's fair; (f) organising programmes for the pupils from the non-formal classes on Independence Day, Republic Day and Gandni Jayanthi; (g) giving prizes for competitions on days of national importance; (h) visiting the classes, arranging for the safety of the girl pupils, settling disputes among the pupils or between the teachers and the community; (i) finding teachers for reviving the closed classes; (j) generally supervising the classes; and (k) planning programmes of community level education.

In one village, the committee offered to even collect funds for the teacher's salary. Discussions are being held with some of the highly motivated committees in order to evolve comprehensive local educational plans.

Comparative Costs of Formal and Non-Formal Primary Education

(a) Full-Time Primary Education

The costs of formal full-time primary education provide the background against which the costs of non-formal part-time primary education can be examined. Salaries of teachers and contingencies for minor monthly expenditure usually figure in the per capita costs of primary education. In Maharashtra the per capita, per annum costs, up to Standard VII, are calculated at Rs. 180 - and from Standard I to IV, at Rs. 160 - approximately. In the case of a child regularly promoted from class to class, the cost of education for four years would amount to Rs. 640.

(b) Non-Formal Primary Education

The experience gained in two years of the Action Research Project shows that an expenditure of Rs. 1480 is required per class of 20 pupils during the first year, and about Rs. 1280 per class during the second year. For the two year course of Standard IV (or up to that level) the cost amounts to Rs. 2760 excluding teacher training costs of Rs. 320 per teacher per year. The following details will make the position clear:

First Year

(i)	Non-recurring equipment	Rs. 300
(ii)	Recurring at Rs. 20 p.m. x 12	Rs. 240
(iii)	Materials for teaching and learning Rs. 70 per set x 3 sets per class	Rs. 210
(iv)	Teacher's honorarium: Rs. 50 p.m. x 12	Rs. 600
(v)	Training cost per teacher: Rs. 40 x 8 (5 day sessions)	Rs. 320

(vi)	Evaluation	Rs. 80
(vii)	Muster Roll, teacher's salaries, pupils' progress cards	Rs. 50
	Total	Rs.1,800

Second Year

In the second year, new equipment is not necessary. Repairs or replacement of non-recurring items cost about Rs. 100. The other expenditure remains the same. Therefore, the budget in the second year gets reduced by Rs. 200 per class and amounts to Rs. 1,600, that is Rs. 1,280 excluding teacher training costs. The per capita average annual cost comes to Rs. 69 or Rs. 138 for the two year course.

(c) Opportunity Costs

In the full-time primary school, the parents are required to spend at least something on books, stationery and the like. Besides, the pupils in a full-time school can neither earn wages nor help the adults in their labours for indirectly adding to the income of the family or for saving the cost of hired labour. In the part-time classes, the enrolment consists of those children who have to work during the day. A survey of their occupations has shown (in the project area) that a child of 9-14 may often earn Rs. 4 per day, on an average, for 200 days in the year or may engage in household tasks or assistance to parents, of which the value would amount to similar wages, though this income is not visible. About 1,000 pupils earn wages of Rs. 4 per day on an average. Their cumulative daily earnings thus amount to Rs. 4,000 per day. Assuming that they work for about 200 days in the year, the total annual earnings would amount to Rs. 800,000 - Rs. 1,600,000 in two years. Their contribution to the maintenance of the family seems substantial. It is also a significant addition to the national income. In a poor country, this is not a minor point which can be brushed aside. As against this income which accrues to the pupils, the expenditure on their part-time education would amount to Rs. 138,000 or, to put it in round figures, about Rs. 140,000. These are points which education planners may find worth examining. Also, there appears to be some scope for increasing the expenditure on teacher training. Two seven-day camps for teachers could be held for intensive training, with full reimbursement of the teachers' loss of wages. The desire of most of the teachers to continue their own education could be satisfied through correspondence cum guidance courses. The rural areas could then begin the process of becoming a "learning society", without stoppage of its normal income.

Some Problems

Experience shows that enrolment and even satisfactory attendance in the part-time classes is not much of a problem. The villages in the project area seem to have awakened to the need for primary education for all and appreciate the idea of evening classes for children who have to work during the day. However, as the programme spread in the interior,

the difficulties of finding teachers increased. In some hamlets very few adults had received primary education. Even if there are primary schools, mostly single teacher schools exist in the vicinty of such hamlets. A teacher who works full-time cannot undertake the responsibility of evening classes. Walking at night through difficult terrain and conducting a part-time class is not an attractive prospect. In the area nearest to Poona, namely Panshet, the attraction of the city results in teacher desertion. Television has reached this area and the timings of its entertainment programmes clash with those of the part-time classes. This makes the pupils irregular in attendance and there are consequent drop-outs. The majority of the pupils of 'A' batch can read well and are asking for continuation of their education beyond two years. The project will have to consider this demand.

Of the drop-outs from the non-formal classes, girls of the traditionally 'marriageable' age of 12 to 13 constitute the majority. Whether this project can undertake a movement for social awakening for raising the age of marriage as required by law, is a moot point. The path in this respect is not quite clear as yet. These problems hold many challenges.

A Community Plan of Education

The communities which have now participated in planning and conducting the part-time classes in the action research project have become aware of their capability to think about their education problems. Some villages have suggested short follow-up courses in health, child care and nutrition, occupational skills and so on. They are ready to find part of the resources and help plan and organise the courses. This is what the project was hoping for. A suggested plan which they may consider would be of the following type:

Age	Programme	
0-3	Education of parents (particularly of mothers) to promote better nutrition, health and immunisation practices. An understanding of the biological and sociological aspects of child development and required roles of parents. Overall social awareness and literacy (if necessary) would be the foundation of this education.	
	Formal Programme	Non-Formal Programme
3-6	Pre-school education	Play centre activities (even up to the age of 7, if necessary)
6-11	Primary education up to Standard IV	Part-time primary education for the 9-14 age group
11-14	Primary education up to Standard VII	(a) as above (b) flexible courses for the 13-17 age group

15-18 (a) A small proportion of this age group will enter Secondary schools.

(b) A few may still linger behind in the upper classes of primary schools.

(c) It is also possible that those who completed primary education up to Standard IV some years before will study the formal curriculum further in continuation classes.

(d) The majority will require non-formal education relevant to their needs, aspirations and environment.

18+ At this level, all or as many members of the community as possible will engage in adult education of some type or the other, according to their needs.

The formulation of such a plan by the community may take the Action Research Project into further experimentation, probably over the next ten years.

MEHER UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION PROJECT

Ellen Sattar

Introduction

The education sytem of Bangladesh has to be seen in the context of poverty, low per capita incomes (around $100 per year), illiteracy rates of about 65 per cent male and 85 per cent female, poor physical infrastructure, unemployment even for many of the educated and an ever increasing population putting intense pressure on land, food and resources. The education system remains largely academic and examination orientated, the legacy of Pakistan and before that of British India. It is a rigid system which has failed to cope with the problems arising from the universalisation of primary education, making secondary education more relevant by the wider introduction of science and technology, and the raising of standards at tertiary levels.

Primary Education in Bangladesh[1]

Numerous difficulties stand in the way of universalisation, despite the Government's intention to do so by 1985. The Second Five Year Plan, 1980-85, gives priority to primary education, with 40 per cent of the total educational allocations going to the primary sector. But the amount has since been cut. A decentralised administrative structure of Local Education Authorities was to be set up but as yet this is hardly underway. Free books to half the students and free clothes to 30 per cent of the girl students were envisaged. The latter has been carried out to a certain extent.

Primary education has a well-established structure of schools, teachers and administrators, although the schools are in poor condition, the teachers too few and the administration overworked. Textbooks are uniform for the entire country. These are fairly good in content but the prices are unaffordable by the poorer families. About 30 per cent of the primary school age group is outside the education system. Of those who enrol, 70 per cent drop out before class 5. Two million fewer girls than boys attend school. Poverty is often the main factor affecting enrolment, retention, success or failure at school. Schools are plagued by repetition and examinations. Enrolment is stagnant. In 1981 it was estimated at 8.2 million of the age group population of 12 million.

There is no long-term perspective planning in education. A realistic assessment of educational needs, types and level of education required and possible future employment opportunities is lacking. The education sector operates in isolation. There should be long-term future planning based on the best estimates of population and economic growth available. Five years is a short time-frame for education where twenty may go to create the highly specialised individual. Five years is merely a convenient administrative and financial reference point. What is the future of the children to be educated under UPE? What employment options will be open to them? How can the education system itself aid those options?

Universalisation, used in a strict sense, means that all children of primary school age are in school. There is no drop out at all. Every child who enters class 1 passes through all the classes and completes class 5.

As primary education cannot physically cope with the children presently enrolling, about 7-8 million, and as little physical renovation has been carried out, it is hardly possible that 12 million children (the present primary school age group) can be accommodated in the schools by 1985 even under a double-shift system. There simply are not enough schools, classrooms, benches or teachers let alone other educational facilities such as simple equipment or books to enable Bangladesh to provide universal primary education. At present the enrolment of 12 millon children is not a practical possibility, not to speak of their retention in the school for five years. Current drop-out is 70 per cent between class 1 and 5 and girls enrol in far less numbers than boys.

There have been no attempts at non-formal schooling in the primary sector nor in the secondary. The First Five Year Plan (1973-78) envisaged feeder schools and educated housewives as teachers at the primary levels while community education centres were planned for the secondary level. None of these plans were carried out. In the Second Five Year Plan these suggestions are not repeated but there are plans for the universalisation of primary education along with the decentralisation of administration and, at the secondary level, non-formal vocational education and skill training for school leavers. In addition a mass education programme to impart functional literacy was envisaged, and has been functioning on a wide scale since 1980. The universalisation and the skill training programmes are hardly underway.

Bangladesh Association for Community Education (BACE)

This organisation is a voluntary, non-profit making educational organisation dedicated to improving the quality and quantity of education available in Bangladesh. Before detailing its objectives and programmes, it is necessary to discuss its members and their role, for their interests and activities determine and dominate the function of BACE.

Members, presently about 30, are all professionals drawn from universities, government service, the business community and educational institutions with a few retired civil servants. Together they set up the organisation, drew up its constitution and framed its rules and they give their time and money to its development. Every two years a nine member governing body is elected from the general members. This governing body meets every two weeks and also appoints committees to deal with various aspects of BACE work. These committees make reports and recommendations to the governing body which passes the appropriate resolutions when necessary.

Through these committees and regular meetings, to which all are invited, BACE members keep a firm control on all its activities. They direct and guide programmes, aid the staff with all project preparation and write many BACE reports. There is close co-operation between BACE members and BACE staff which enhances BACE operations, for most BACE members are highly skilled experts in their various fields. It is the enthusiasm and dedication of BACE members which keeps the organisation going.

Objectives

BACE was established (i) to utilise community support to make education more efficient, more effective and in particular more responsive to the needs of the community, viewing non-formal education as supplementing and supporting the formal system, and (ii) to provide a forum for educational ideas and innovation, to develop models appropriate in the context of Bangladesh and to spread ideas on educational innovation, appropriate technology, health-care and population control.

Additionally BACE wished to aid the most disadvantaged groups in society - the poor rural dwellers, girls, illiterate youths, and urban slum people. These are the groups not merely socially disadvantaged but excluded from the formal education system by virtue of their socio-economic condition. The two disadvantages reinforce each other; BACE viewed education as a means to break the reinforcement by giving literacy and practical skills which would both enhance life and generate income. In addition BACE viewed primary education as the main vehicle for achieving national literacy.

BACE members were all well aware of the problems of the education system and they envisaged developing and supporting projects which provided solutions that were practical, replicable and low-cost. The main strategy lies in the belief that communities and individuals know their own requirements, can contribute towards programmes in numerous ways, and should therefore be actively involved in programme activities.

BACE Programmes

BACE runs five main programmes: scholarship programmes at the secondary level, a universal primary education project, non-formal community schools, a widely distributed journal and women's programmes.

Meher Universal Primary Education Project

Seven years ago the pilot project on universal primary education began in Meher Union (a union is the lowest tier of the local government institutions, comprising 10-15 villages) situated 22 miles west of Comilla. It is funded by the Ministry of Education and BACE is the executing agency. The project began first in a group of villages called Panchagram where, in 1975, a special village development co-operative had been set up.

The Panchagram Shamabay

This co-operative, Meher Panchagram Shamabay, was the first multi-purpose village development co-operative ever registered in Bangladesh. It aimed at total village development and committees were organised under a village council to supervise and improve all aspects of life - livestock, fisheries, poultry, education, culture, religion and welfare, roads and communication, irrigation, agriculture, electrification, youth and women's activities.

The Co-operative was organised first in five villages, hence the name Panchagram, but shortly after its inception it took in two small adjoining villages; thus it consists actually of seven villages but retains its original name Panchagram. In 1977 the whole of Meher Union, consisting of 24 villages, organised itself as a Shawnirvar (self-help) union. Meher Union was divided into seven Shawnirvar blocks of which Panchagram was one.

When the project started there in March 1976, the area was very different from what a visitor may find today. There was no motorable road into the area, not even a rickshaw could reach the village from the main road because of the unbridged deep Khal (canal) next to the main road. Only two bamboo poles lashed together served as the link between the road and the footpath to the villages. The first two villages were reached after 25 minutes fast walking on a narrow, pot-holed path winding between the paddy fields and bamboo clumps.

It was a typical sleepy, backward area where time seemed to have no meaning, where footpaths were washed out in the rainy weather and where isolation, fatalism and rural primitiveness were predominant. There was no electricity, no rural industries, no "development" of any kind.

The starting of the Panchagram Shamabay was the turning point for the area. It had one priceless asset - leadership from a truly committed village elder who was delighted to spend his time and energy in helping the advancement of the people. But development was slow and at the beginning only the education project strongly supported by all classes of villagers was effective. Other development works did not gain momentum until 1977. However, in the first two years tanks were cleaned, roads made up and the entire Panchagram was surveyed by the village youth. The community also built four "feeder schools", (so-called as they "feed" the children into class 2 and 3 of the primary school). Land, building materials and labour were all donated by the community. This was in accordance with the education project agreement that if the community provided schools, the project would provide money for teachers, books and equipment.

These schools were completed by January 1976 when the project should have started, but funds were not available until June that year. However, the local education committee hired teachers and ayahs, scrounged around for old books and opened the schools in March, enrolling over 400 children within two months.

Within one year villagers from the rest of the Union were asking for their area to be included in the education project. Eighteen more feeder schools were built to accommodate all the out-of-school children, and almost two thousand of them were enrolled. This area became the extended project area and received funds from June 1977.

Organisation and Administration

The whole Union is organised into a Union Education Committee composed of the Shawnirvar Block chairmen, local primary school headteachers and other elected Shawnirvar and Shamabay officials. It meets once a month and discusses educational problems and approves the action of project officials. It praises teachers for good work, censures teachers for poor performance and can recommend disciplinary action.

The project is run by locally hired personnel - a project officer and his deputy, one part-time accountant and a field assistant. All have bicycles and they travel all over the Union checking up on the schools and helping the teachers. Twice a month, on alternate Saturdays, all teachers attend in-service training at the project office.

Project officials are responsible to the Project Director who is a member of BACE Governing Body but, except in policy matters, the Director stays in the background and encourages all decisions to be made locally in consultation with the Union and Shawnirvar Block Community. The overall administration of the project is by BACE, and Annual Reports and audits are submitted to the Ministry of Education. BACE officers liaise with the local project officials and the Union Education Committee.

Community participation and continuing interest sustain the project. The project never had funds for building schools; all land, materials and labour had to be donated by the local community. The response has been excellent especially considering that this was accomplished in what was then a backward rural area. There is criticism that the education project succeeded because it was in Meher Panchagram but the fact is that the two things, organisation and rural development, grew together. The organisational, administrative and development aspects of the project are simple and may be replicated anywhere in Bangladesh.

A second important feature of the scheme is the employment of local people. Only one individual, an education specialist, of the 75 employed in the project has been from outside the Union. This makes a large number of people in the Union interested in, and aware of, educational progress. The Union Education Committe has 30-40 members and they, together with all the employees, make over 100 individuals concerned with education. Compared with any other neighbouring Union, one can state that more individuals in Meher are aware of educational problems and that many of them have been involved in finding solutions. This results in an enlarged awareness about education beneficial to the entire Union.

Non-Formal Aspect

Meher UPE used a non-formal approach - the feeder schools - to supplement the inadequate formal education system. In 1976, the primary school enrolment could not cover all the children in the Union. There were eight primary schools, only three of which had a permanent or semi-permanent building. The others were in a very poor condition. The official enrolment was about 1,600. No class 5 exceeded 16 pupils and the drop-out was about 80 per cent. Less than 50 per cent of the Union's children were in school. There were about 3,700 primary school age children.

The feeder schools were opened to accommodate pre-class 1, class 1 and some class 2 students. The idea was to teach reading, writing and counting, and then "feed" the children into primary schools. The primary schools, relieved from the usual enormous class 1 numbers, would be able to cope better with enlarged classes 2-5, as the years passed. Moreover, this scheme would enable the experienced primary school teachers to have the more vital upper classes. The idea worked. In 1981 enrolment at all the primary schools averaged 292 students despite having no class 1. Two of the schools enrolled over 4000 students each.

Feeder School Teachers

Hiring professional teachers would have made the cost too high. Moreover, not enough trained teachers would be available in the Union to staff the feeder schools. The Director reasoned that any literate educated person could, with goodwill and enthusiasm, teach a child to read and write. All education systems begin with less qualified, untrained teachers; so would the UPE project. Forty-four local people, two-thirds women, were employed as teachers. They received in-service training at the project office twice a month. In general they have proved to be quite adequate as feeder school teachers.

Women Teachers and Ayahs

Each feeder school employs an ayah to provide a respectable "chaperone" to the girls. Even in schools where women are employed, an ayah is appointed and she helps the teachers with infant pupils. The majority of the ayahs are elderly widows but some are married and a few are young unmarried girls. The appointment of women as teachers was another

crucial feature of the project. The Director insisted on women teachers for it was thought that their presence would encourage girls' enrolment. Also, women were believed to be better teachers than men for the beginning classes.

There was opposition to this in the community, but after one year's critical scrutiny community attitudes veered sharply. The women were acknowledged as good conscientious teachers far better than the local primary school teachers. In contrast with the latter, the feeder school teachers opened school on time every day, taught double-shift and had no students dropping out. The lesson was lost on nobody and as the years passed subtle community pressures forced the local primary school teachers to emulate the women teachers.

The use of local women as teachers has now become quite acceptable. Local feeder school teachers know their students and students know their teachers. No corporal punishment is allowed. Poetry and singing is encouraged and fairy stories and folk tales are read to the children. School has become an interesting place and an attractive experience. To some extent this had influenced the primary schools too; the schools in the Union have a liveliness and enthusiasm usually absent in other primary schools. The teachers cope well with the large classes and appear stimulated by the situation. This is in contrast to the early days when feeder school students were refused admission to class 2 because there were too many of them.

Salaries

No teacher is paid over Tk.150 ($8) per month except for 6 "master" teachers who receive double that amount. In an isolated village setting, this is an attractive wage for no other employment is available to the teachers. Were the project nearer a town or city, wages might have to be higher to appear attractive. There have been no wage increases but to celebrate entering the fifth year of the project all employees were paid a bonus of one month's salary in 1980 dependent upon their length of service. Teachers' turnover is about 5 per cent a year and there is never any difficulty in filling the positions. Many of the teachers have taught between 3-5 years in the project.

Provision of Free Textbooks

Initially the project supplied textbooks only to the feeder school students and to those who continued in the primary schools. This restriction became awkward once the extended project opened in 1977 and so free books were supplied to all the primary school students in the Union as well. This was much appreciated especially after the price increases in 1978 as it made primary education virtually free. In the feeder schools the project provides chalk, slates, exercise books and pencils but these are not provided to the primary school students. However, as an incentive to accept and teach the large numbers of students entering classes 2 and 3, the project also supplies chalk to the primary schools as the Tk.3 per teacher per month allowed to each school is insufficient for this purpose.

Apart from free textbooks, educational equipment and extra story books, the project has provided one steel cupboard for every feeder school. In some cases benches have also been provided. Additionally, a medical inspection has been given every year and medicines have been provided for diarrhoea, intestinal worms, and vitamin deficiencies.

Enrolment and Drop-out

There is still 100 per cent enrolment of children in the feeder schools. They cannot be retained; many drop out when it is time to be transferred to the primary schools. A recent independent survey of the project area estimated a 43 per cent drop-out up to grade 5. This is an improvement over the national figure of 70 per cent drop-out especially as Meher Union begins with 100 per cent cohort enrolment in contrast to the national cohort enrolment of around 60 per cent. Records on the 1976 cohort as they moved up the school found a 26 per cent drop-out over five years. These children all went to the first four Panchagram feeder schools.

Table 1

Enrolment in 22 feeder Schools of Meher, 1981

	Infant Class	Class 1	Class 2	Total
Boys	342	366	90	798
Girls	296	330	83	709
Total	638	696	173	1507
Average class size in 3 schools only	29	32	50	

As Table 1 shows, the 22 feeder schools had over 1,500 students in 1981. Because of the number of schools, the class average is low and each child received more personal attention from teachers than in the usual over-crowded class 1 of the primary school.

Table 2

Enrolment in 8 Primary Schools of Meher, 1981, Class 2-5

	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Total
Boys	418	308	247	203	1,176
Girls	441	295	249	177	1,162
Total	859	603	496	380	2,338
Average class size Meher	107	75	62	47	292

Source for Tables: Fifth Annual Report, Meher, UPE, 1981.[2]

Table 2 illustrates the high enrolment and retention in the Union's 8 primary schools. The average class size, class 2-5, is far higher than the national average and shows the success of Meher UPE in enrolment and retention of students. A class 5 average of 47 for village schools is unique. Moreover, retention is increasing each year and is expected to be 90 per cent cohort retention of grade 5 by 1985.

Girls' Enrolment

The project achieved its goal of 100 per cent enrolment of girl students and five years later the ratio of boys to girls at the 8 union primary schools had reached parity whereas nationally it is 63:37. This is a good achievement, nor has girls' drop-out rate been higher than boys', as is usually the case. The local people are pleased that girls do not have to walk far to school and they are pleased about the female teachers. Some girls, perhaps one per cent, do not attend the primary schools but stay on at the nearest feeder school for as long as possible.

Over 50 women in the union are employed in the project and their example must help to raise the status of working women, as well as to be a model for the girls.

Repetition

This has been a great problem. For universalising primary education, automatic promotion is a necessity. Students who repeat classes, especially classes 1 and 2, practically all drop-out of the school system. Only recently however, it has been possible to win over local opinion on this point. Even in the feeder schools instructions to promote the children every year were ignored and the Director eventually had to force the issue. Once the students are in the primary schools, there was no control over them and of the 1976 cohort 31 per cent were retained in lower grades in 1980, whereas all should have been in grade 5. By 1981 attitudes had changed and repetition in the primary schools was only 6 per cent that year.

This illustrates the enormity of the problem, the strong entrenched attitudes and the difficulty of change even under the best of conditions. In Meher it took six years before the near abolition of repetition took place. There is little understanding by teachers themselves of one of the most serious problems of primary education. There is no justification for repetition although numerous excuses may be made for it. Apart from the harm to the individual students, it makes the entire system inefficient.

Costs

Nearly two-thirds of the total fixed costs of the project was financed from local resources.[3] The annual cost per student in the feeder schools was estimated at 76 takas in 1980.[4] These costs include not only teachers' salaries but also the provision of books, slates and equipment. As large numbers of children are enrolled, costs per student are kept low. The same must be true of the primary schools where enrolment is far above average.

These low costs make the scheme attractive and the initial contribution of the community to the fixed costs has been impressive. "If local resources could be mobilized along this line elsewhere in Bangladesh, the Treasury could be relieved of a substantial financial burden",[5] was the conclusion of a recent evaluation.

Impact of the Project

There is no doubt that the project has had an influence on education within the Union. Additionally it has provided 75 jobs to the local people. It has enrolled and kept hundreds of children in schools who would never have attended otherwise. It has had success with the enrolment of girls and indirectly it may have changed the quality of education imparted in the primary schools.

It has not been able to prevent drop-out. Children from the poorest families drop out still, so do boys and girls who enrolled late in school. Repetition has not been entirely eliminated. Students still crowd the lower grades.

A positive sign has been the increasing accuracy of educational statistics collected. A 1975 educational survey was useless as a 100 per cent inflation of registered students was normal (by the primary schools). Today that has changed and figures published in the Annual Reports of Meher UPE are accurate. However limited, these provide some accurate statistics on primary education in rural Bangladesh.

Evaluation

There have been two independent evaluations of the Meher UPE Project.[6] Both reached positive conclusions and praised community involvement, girls' enrolment, low costs and easy replicability of the project. The main findings are given below:

(1) The Project has had an enormous impact on girls' enrolment with 49 per cent of all the students being girls. Moreover, girls' retention in the higher grades continues to be very good - better than the national average.

(2) The standard of instruction in grade 1 was higher than that in the primary schools of the adjoining Union.

(3) Attendance rates in the Union were higher than those for the country as a whole.

(4) 90 per cent of all the households with primary school age children are sending those children to school.[7] The concluding recommendation is that "if the people of the community participate with their own interest then it will be helpful for the Government to introduce universal primary education within a short time by establishing feeder-schools in the non-school villages rather than establishing any more primary schools."[8] Such a scheme would generate considerable employment on a large scale basis, but costs

would still be lower than in the present primary schools. This evaluation recommended phased expansion of the scheme to cover the whole country within 5 years.[9]

Relevance and Replicability

Many of the problems of primary education in the area have been partly or wholly eliminated. The latter include girls' low enrolment, lack of female teachers, lack of community involvement, poor teacher attendance and performance, low enrolment, and inflation of rolls. Partially eliminated are drop-out and repetition.

On these grounds the project is a success and the use of feeder schools and local teachers, unqualified and untrained but intelligent and enthusiastic, as a supplement to the primary schools has proved to be a far more efficient method of primary education than just the traditional primary schools. Moreover, costs are low- lower than primary schools generally even with all the extra inputs.

Perhaps the most significant feature is community participation and local contribution. The cost of building 22 small schools would have been high and would have made the project quite unrealistic as a model for achieving universal primary education. As it is, the local involvement, local committees, locally hired teachers, ayahs and project officials, are all easily replicable elsewhere. The feeder school system gives the children a chance to develop a positive attitude towards education, a chance to learn basic reading and writing so that entry into primary school is easy, and a chance to learn the daily discipline of school in a caring homely atmosphere.

It is the opinion of many observers that the project offers a practical model to ensure universal primary education over the whole country if adopted on a large scale. Meher UPE had been copied in several areas of Bangladesh, most notably in the Chagalnaia and Luxmipur thanas in Noakhali, in Rangunia thana in Chittogong and in other scattered localities particularly the Shawnirvar thanas. It is attractive because of the low cost and community participation. But even so, the salary and book costs are high unless borne by some outside agency, such as by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) in Noakhali.

Meher UPE being a rural experiment has much to offer. First it shows how communities are willing to become involved in education on a continuing basis. The people did not merely build the schools; they continue to contribute by repair and maintenance work. One lesson can be accepted: that once organised, rural communities are most willing to work and contribute for the welfare of their own children.

Meher UPE shows how intelligent but untrained people may be used although, in this case, there is an in-service training component. Perhaps the greatest value of Meher UPE is that it demonstrates how a non-formal component can act as a supplement to the formal school system and double the latter's efficiency. The feeder schools, by enrolling all

the children, demonstrate one way of universalising enrolment at the primary level. By imparting basic instruction to the children in infant class and class 1, they prepare the students to enter the formal school system at class 2. The formal schools, relieved of the burden of class 1, can manage to cope with the even larger class 2-5 enrolments.

A comparison in the following table of the class-wise distribution of enrolment nationally and in Meher UPE shows how those areas are superior to the national average.

Table 3

Class-wise Distribution of Enrolment Between Classes, Meher UPE and National Average (as a percentage) 1980

Classes	Meher UPE	National average
1	22	41
2	32	21
3	19	16
4	15	12
5	12	9

Source: Meher UPE Annual Report 1981: BACE Report

Also, total costs are low, even though all books are free. These low costs make it an attractive programme and the simplicity of its operation also makes it easily replicable. Until such time as the government is able to provide primary education facilities in the formal schools to all the children, the Meher UPE model offers an easy and inexpensive way of universalising enrolment. The salary structure helps to keep the overall costs low and the model may be adopted and made even cheaper by the use of one-teacher schools, where appropriate, or by the provision of books to the poorest children only.

A particularly important feature of Meher UPE has been the infant class. Given the mainly illiterate background from which primary school children come, it is essential to establish "infant classes" all over the country. This may be compared with the one year kindergarten of the American school system before the child begins formal learning in grade 1. After completing infant class the child stands a much better chance of coping with the class 1 experience. It is an essential head start for the deprived children from the poorest sections of rural and urban society. Feeder schools, infant classes, mosque schools, maktabas - all may be used for this essential head start programme.

Summary and Conclusions

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has a

rapidly increasing population and limited resources. There is a formal educational system with primary education, till very recently, being the most neglected sector. The decision to go for UPE is a most necessary step towards the path of national development and the growth of the nation's greatest resource - the brains of her people, but the pace of universalisation cannot be quickened without far greater resource allocation to the primary sector. If, by 1985 the administrative structure of primary education is decentralised and expanded it will be a great achievement. If, at the same time, through school mapping exercises and the establishment of new and improved facilities, enough school places are created for the estimated 16 million children of primary age, it will be a tremendous achievement. If, in addition, enough trained teachers are available to staff the schools Bangladesh will be upon the threshold of a move towards universalisation. The preconditions for universalisation must be created before the actual universalisation drive begins or Bangladesh will find, as other countries have done, that universalisation is an empty promise and must be restarted several years later.

However, a great deal could be achieved, with a shift in emphasis and a willingness to encourage people and communities to assist in the effort, with a more realistic statement of goals and objectives.

Additionally, of course, there would be the compounded problem of children out of school increasing annually. An approach which might yield results would be the use of all existing institutions, recognised and non-recognised, religious and secular, and taking cognisance of their potential while planning for universalisation.

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3. Mazharul Haque et. al., An Evaluation of the Meher Panchagram UPE Pilot Project. (Dacca, 1980).

4. ibid.

5. ibid.

6. ibid. p. 51

7. ibid, and D.B. Gupta and M.D. Hossain, Universal Primary Education, Meher Comilla. (Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD), 1980).

8. Mazharul Huque, et. al., An Evaluation of the Meher Panchagram UPE Pilot Project. (Dacca 1980).

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SCHOOLS OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY

T K Sundari

It is about half past seven in the evening. Having got off the bus on the main road, one walks down a winding road, leading to the "colony"@ of the village. It is pitch dark everywhere. There are one or two street lamps along the path but they are not functioning. There is a lone light in the distance. Walking towards it one reaches a thatched hut, lit by a petromax light. About twenty-five children are sitting inside. Their appearance suggests that they come from very poor families and are there now after a long weary day. They are sitting in two groups. One group is busy painting with bamboo stick brushes on old newspapers and the other group is filling in the blanks in their work books. There is a young man walking around. "Vathiyare, Vathiyare" (teacher) the children call out to him frequently. Maybe they want to discuss a problem or show him what they have done.

This is a familiar scene to the residents of the "colony" in the 30 villages in Chingleput Taluk, (District Sub-Division) where the "alternative schools" for children of the Rural Development Society have been running for the past two years, catering for the needs of children between 6-14 years who cannot attend school, since they have to work during the day.

The Milieu

Chingleput District in Tamilnadu is immediately south of Madras, the capital of Tamilnadu and the farthest village in the project area would be only about 100 kilometres away from the city.

Agriculture is the primary occupation of the inhabitants. Rice, millet and groundnut are the main crops in the area. There are at least two harvests of rice and one of groundnut or millet every year. High yielding varieties are cultivated and pump set irrigation is prevalent in all the villages. Due to the intensity of cultivation, there is need for farm hands the year round and employment opportunities are not scarce.

Despite the richness of land and abundance of produce, degrees of poverty and inequality are glaring. For example, while more than 40 per cent of the population own not even a scrap of land to eke out a living, 4 per cent own nearly 48 per cent of the total cultivated area. Miserably low wages are paid to labourers. The average wage earned by agricultural labourers for a 9-hour work day is between 3 rupees and 6 rupees for men and 1.50 to 3.50 for women.

@ The 'colony' is that section of the village where the scheduled caste reside and is called 'cheri'.

Caste discrimination still prevails. The harijans who are the lowest in the caste hierachy are even to this day considered 'untouchable' by the members of other castes. Every village is divided into the 'Cheri' or 'colony' where the harijans live, and the 'Oor' (village proper) where members of all the other castes reside. They are nearly always separated by a distance of at least one kilometre, so that the distance between the harijans or out-castes and other castes is real even in the geographical sense or physical sense. It is easy to distinguish the 'Oor' from the 'Cheri' of any village from the thatched huts and lack of basic amenities in the latter.

Though caste and economic class hierachies are no longer congruent, harijans are for the most part agricultural labourers. A good number of them are landless as well. Whole families - men, women and children - have to toil hard in the fields to keep body and soul together.

As regards infrastructural developments Chingleput district is far ahead of many others. The villages are well connected by public transport. All the villages have electricity and street lamps are to be found along the village roads.

The percentage of literates is between 20 and 30 but for the harijans this falls between 8 and 12. Most harijan children of today will be the illiterate adults of tomorrow, since they work to support their families and cannot attend schools even though nearly all the villages have at least one primary school within a five kilometre radius.

The schools are usually run by Panchayat Unions; in some villages however there are Church of South India (CSI) schools. The Panchayat Union and Government schools are all located in the upper caste sections of the village, whereas the CSI schools are in the harijan 'Cheri' (pronounced Cheyree). The Panchayat Union schools are more an excuse for the term "school" since they far from perform that function. There is one teacher managing a school with three (grading) classes. There are 40 or 45 children to a class. The same teacher simultaneously teaches Class I, Class II and Class III. He writes the vowels A, Ae, E, Ee, on the board and asks the children in the first class to keep repeating them and writing them on their slates; it is 1, 2, 3 for the children in the second class. One boy, the "class leader", stands in front of the class and calls out a lesson endlessly. A whole day's work is just this. In this way, what would a child learn?

One day in a meeting, the animators sat and discussed the union or formal schools they went to, as children. They recalled how they had sworn never to be teachers. Their experience, as pupils, had led them to believe that there could not be a more uninteresting or meaningless job they could have aspired to. The animators came to see teaching as a joyful and creative learning process only after their association with the National Adult Education Programme and the

Rural Development Society. Here are some descriptions by the animators of the union schools which they went to.

"I studied in a union school located near my village. The 'Vathiyar' (teacher) would ask us, the Cheri boys, to report at his house at eight in the morning. Our chores would begin with cleaning up the cow-shed and collecting the dung. After that, we would go home, eat our morning meal and hurry back to school. If one or two of us did not go to his place promptly at 8 a.m. because of some work at home, we would be punished ..."

"Punishment was such an integral part of life at school, that to us school came to be associated with the rod. It seemed to us that we were coming to school not for our benefit, but to fulfil some unknown obligation towards the teacher ..."

"Once we were about 13 years of age, the work load at home would be immense. We would get up by 3 a.m. to plough the fields and then go to school at 9 in the morning. Most often, we would have to walk or cycle 4 to 5 kilometres. After returning from school, we had to take the draught animals for grazing and would be too tired to study at night. Even if we did make an attempt, insufficient lighting would make it impossible. The single oil lamp at home would be needed for cooking, taking care of the babies and doing various household work. The street light is not reliable since it is so often fused. It is a very difficult life for us harijan children. We cannot get very far with formal schooling. That is why even the handful of us who have gone to high school are all eighth class failed or S.S.L.C. (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) failed ..."

The National Adult Education Programme

The winds of change began to sweep across the village cheris with the coming of the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) of the Government of India in 1978. The Tirukazhukundram and Tirupporur Blocks were covered by the programme through the efforts of a voluntary organisation. In nearly all the villages selected for the programme, the centres were started in the cheri. The teachers in these adult education centres, young men and women also from the cheri, were trained by the project personnel.

The adult education centres were probably among the first real programmes that actually reached the people of the cheri. Even today, the "adult" programme - as the villagers refer to it - is remembered as the most important landmark in the cheri's history, though the programme lasted only for about fourteen months. The programme tapered to a halt due to various reasons.

Even while the programme was ongoing, one question that the adult learners asked was: "what is the point of running a school for us when so many of our children are not educated? It looks as if you want to have batches and batches of illiterates so that adult education programmes can go on forever." That made the participants and organisers think

seriously about starting evening schools for children and about a follow-up programme for the adults who had become literate through the NAEP.

In the gap between leaving the NAEP and starting the Rural Development Society, the organisers kept in touch with the animators and had meetings with them as and when possible. Those animators who were interested in continued involvement in community work came to these meetings. It was then that the plan to work in villages through evening schools for children and discussion groups for adults crystallised.

The Rural Development Society

The Rural Development Society (RDS) was formed late in 1979. The ground work for the programme in terms of selections of villages and animators, planning for the animator's training and setting up the administrative office began in January 1980. The training for animators was held between 21 and 30 April 1980, and the schools started functioning immediately afterwards.

The schools were intended to become manifestations of "people's power" to prove their capacity to run their own organisations and institutions. The RDS believed that given the opportunity to actually get involved, the community would, with experience, prove itself capable. Only through such experiments could genuine people's organisations emerge.

The RDS visualised that animators drawn from the villages would become competent in teaching, planning the curriculum and in due course also preparing learning materials by themselves. It was also hoped, that eventually, even the administration of the schools would be totally in their hands, and that more and more villagers other than animators would get actively involved in the running of the schools. As for criteria the animators' commitment to this idea and their enthusiasm to train themselves to meet the demands made on them were more important than academic brilliance or achievement.

It was envisaged that these non-formal education centres would not merely be an attempt to provide push-outs and drop-outs from the formal education system with an opportunity to learn, but in fact endeavour to be an alternative to the formal system without its evils. The shortcomings in the formal system consist not only of failures in strategy, scarcity of resources or certain characterisations of its bureaucratisation or institutionalisation, but also in the values and ideas perpetuated through its techniques of communication and by the interpersonal relationship within the system.

The RDS children's non-formal education centres on the other hand were to be concerned with providing the children with knowledge and skills relevant to their lives, developing in them a capacity for objective inquiry and critical reflection instead of passive adaptation, helping grow up as men and women who comprehend their roles in the environment around them and make intelligently conceived efforts towards change.

Their classrooms were to be open discussion forums where both teachers and students have the freedom to ask and answer questions. The structure of the learning situation would be non-competitive, with no provision for marks and tests, no individual comparions or urges to compete. Only in such an environment would the children learn to share their skills and knowledge. No rules or regulations were to be imposed and the rules felt necessary to be observed by all would be laid down by the students and teachers jointly. Each child was to be helped to work at his or her own pace and level and would not be pressurised to attain and maintain predetermined standards.

The centres, it was visualised, would thus strive to impart values that serve the interest of the oppressed and promote social change. The techniques would be low cost with teaching aids made from local materials by the animators and children as a mutual teaching and learning experience. In short, "self-reliance" would be the goal, which is indeed essential if the programme is to sustain itself ultimately with the limited resources of the people.

The Objectives

The specific objectives of the programmes are summarised below.

(1) To help children increase their sensitivity to the beauty and wonder of the world around them:

a) to encourage the child to ask questions, and to conduct experiments;

b) to prompt the child to test the validity of each and everything prior to acceptance;

c) to help children practice suspension of their judgement and be prepared to wait and observe rather than to jump to quick conclusions;

d) to help the child to collect information about the world around and to present this information in an orderly way;

e) to help the children to develop sufficient basic skills to choose for themselves what they want to learn, taking care to see that they identify and acquire the scientific way of thinking (observe, record, analyse the recordings, and in daily life apply such analyses); and

f) to encourage children to cooperate with each other in experiments and in the enjoyment of scientific discovery and to encourage peer learning.

(2) To provide the children an opportunity to learn and to practice some important and useful skills, drawing, copying, observing and recording, collecting, measuring and mapping;

(3) To enable children to acquire learning skills, particularly those of language and numeracy through interesting and relevant activities;

(4) To provide important means of enriching the child's experience of the world through creative arts - to provide children with means for self expression, helping them to develop aesthetic sensitivity;

(5) To help children to use their voice to express their feelings and emotions; to widen the range of the child's voice, to learn folk songs, national songs and action songs and to encourage group singing;

(6) To help children become aware of the inherent rhythm that exists in the body and surroundings through dance and also to discover rhythm in walking, movement patterns, expressing emotions through movement and the improvisation of folk dances;

(7) To help children discover the dramatic element in an episode from daily life by dramatising a story, improvising dialogues, building up characters and staging plays; and

(8) To help children to integrate various fragments of collected information, deepen and increase their perception through displays and exhibitions.

The People

The Children

The children attending the alternative schools are all from very poor families and have dropped out or have never attended school. They work during the day and come to the evening schools after a very hard day's work. Most of the harijan children start work at the very early age of seven or eight, and are engaged in what is known as "Padivelai". A harijan labourer who needs a loan from a landlord agrees to send his son to work for him in return for the loan given. The boy thus sent has to do any work that the landlord asks him to do, is given two meals a day and a monthly wage of about ten rupees. Even this monthly wage is usually adjusted against interest payable on the loan taken. This is called "Padivelai".

Thambiran, a 12 year old comes to the 'alternative school' in his village since he does padivelai during the day. He says: "In the days when the field has to be prepared for sowing, I go to work at about 10 or 11 o'clock at night, and start ploughing the fields.

I come home before dawn. After some rest, I clean the cow shed, remove the cow dung and take animals for grazing. At noon I get rice and curry to eat at the landlord's place after which I get back to grazing the animals. By five in the evening I bring them back to their shed and feed them. With that, my work day is over. Sometimes I may be asked to run an errand or two in which case I have to come late to school."

It is only boys who are sent to do padivelai. The girls have to do household work, take care of the younger children in the family and also take the family's animals, if any, for grazing. Their days are so full that they find it difficult to attend even the evening school. They have to give their mothers a helping hand in preparing the family's only meal for the day which is cooked in the evening. Also, once the girls attain puberty, the parents are not willing to let them go out after sunset. The prospects for the education of girls is therefore bleaker than for the boys.

The children have been coming to the alternative schools for two years now. Here is what some of them had to say about themselves, the school, and the reasons why they have been attending it.

"I am Perumal. I work as a construction labourer. I only work in my own village or in the neighbouring village. I am paid four rupees or three rupees a day and given a meal. I work from ten in the morning to five in the evening. I studied up to class three and had to stop schooling to take care of my baby brother when my parents went away for harvesting. I have been working for the past three years as a construction labourer. Before that I did padivelai for two years. I worked in a Mudaliar (upper caste Hindu) home for one year and left because he gave me very little to eat. In the next place I went to work in, I was underpaid. I finally decided to stop doing padivelai ."

"I am just returning from working in the Thalaivar's (village headman) house. I just finished tying the cows back in their shed and feeding them straw. They gave me 10 paise when I came. I have not eaten still. I will have to go back from the school and then eat."

"I studied up to class one and then stopped studying to graze the cows we own. One day when I was in the grazing grounds, some of the boys told me that a school for boys like us had started and that it functioned in the evening. So I decided to come ... so that I can learn the alphabets ... You ask me why? Suppose I get a letter now, I have to run to others and ask them to read and tell me the contents and more often than not, they will say they are too busy. If I am literate I do not have to be dependent on others for such things."

"If one studies, one can get a job ... not the kind of work I do; something much better like an office job. I want to study a lot - up to the very end ..."

"I work in the fields, ploughing and harvesting. Now I can read and write, it is good to know to read and write. It is not directly useful for agricultural work. But what is wrong with being literate and working in the fields?"

"Every cow herd in this colony is now in this evening school. We do get together during the day on the grazing ground while watching the animals and sing a song we learnt the previous evening, or practice writing numbers and alphabets or play a game."

"We learn a lot of things in the school and in the exhibitions. This time, in the science exhibition, we learnt that house flies are the cause of so many dreadful diseases. But try telling this to people at home! No one listens!"

"It is a very difficult life for us. I work, my mother works and my father works. The landowner does not have to work - he sits in the shade and yet gets enough to eat ... If only I had five acres of land, then I won't work for anyone else. I will work on my own land and take all the harvested grain home ... With what I earn, I will buy a milch cow or two and through selling the milk, I will earn more money ... You ask what I will do with all that money? Say someone wants a hundred rupees or so as a loan, I will lend it out on interest ... I will buy good clothes, eat good food, and I won't have to struggle like this ..."

"I was very keen on going to school, but my parents made me stay back at home after I finished class one. They wanted me to take care of the goats. Now when I take books home from this evening school and read and write, they say, 'If this child had gone to school, imagine how well he would have done!' Only now they realise this. Earlier they used to say, 'what is the use of going to school, you won't learn a paisa's worth ...' Now they say, 'Poor child, he should have been allowed to study further ...'"

There was one incident which jolted the RDS into realising the utter monotony of these childrens' lives and the truth that poverty had robbed them of childhood's most precious attributes, fun, fantasy, wonder, imagination. This is a recollection of what happened in a story telling session in one of the classes where each child said one line and a story was built up. "Once upon a time there lived a king and a queen ..." "They had a son". "The son was sent for padivelai ..." "He used to get up early in the morning and go to work and come back late in the evening ..." "and thus he grew up, and got married one day ..." "This couple had two children, a son and a daughter ..." "The son went for padivelai and the daughter did work at the house." And so the story went on, through generations of royal children who did padivelai or took care of younger siblings at home till all the 30 children in the class had added his sentence in the story. The incident reinforced the commitment to the objectives with which RDS started. The children should have an opportunity to open up their minds to see nature and around them and be stimulated to experience childhood pleasures.

The Animators

The animators or teachers are all young men and women drawn from the cheri in which the school functions. As mentioned earlier, with the exception of two or three, the rest of the animators had earlier worked with the National Adult Education Programme and were teaching adults. In a sense, many of them were part of the present programme from the planning stage itself. They range in age from 19 to 37 years and the majority of them have either studied up to class eight or have failed their school final exams. They are all harijans. Most of them are occupied in agriculture and work during the day on leased land or land they own. This enables them to conduct the classes at a time suitable to the children, whose working hours like theirs change with the agricultural seasons. The animators being from the same village share similar experiences in agriculture and animal husbandry, and other environmental problems with the children, and understand their problems and difficulties. They do not write the children off as dull, stupid or ineducable. They know what it is to be labelled thus and the damage it does to the child's mind. They are willing to give every child a fair chance. This kind of identification with the children is of far greater importance than the skills and efficiency a "trained" teacher from outside would perhaps have. When they began, the animators did not have the necessary formal training, had a poor information base, and had never been introduced to serious self learning.

To the RDS the challenge was to explode the myth that education is a field so specialised that it is beyond the comprehension of the ordinary man, that no man with common wisdom can dare become an educator - someone who can initiate the learning process. For, is not life itself education and is not everyone learning at every stage of his life? The RDS accepted that training was essential, and that it should be made easily accessible to motivate individuals.

The schools are run part-time, so that employment in this project does not become the animator's sole means of earning a livelihood. Dependency of that kind erodes the commitment and dedication with which they start, and the project deteriorates into a source of employment. If this project ended they would be compelled to look for employment in another project instead of staying on in their own villages and working for their people.

The Programme Implementing Agency

The Rural Development Society which is the agency implementing the programme, was started through the initiative of those who were associated with the NEAP in the Tirukazhukundram block. It is a secular organisation with committed young people. The programme started with a staff of three coordinators in charge of administration, materials and methods, training and research respectively, and three assistant coordinators each of them responsible for 10 schools and one assistant coordinator responsible for follow-up programme for adults. In addition, there were 33 animators and two office staff.

The plan was that as the programme progressed, the animators would be gradually given more and more responsibility and some of the coordinators and assistant coordinators would withdraw. Accordingly, there are now only two assistant coordinators and of these, only one is responsible for the schools. There is a single coordinator for the whole programme. The animators are gradually getting more and more involved with all aspects of running the programme. In early 1981, all the animators became members of the Rural Development Society with the right to take decisions affecting it, and to be acquainted with all matters connected with the society. In late 1981, the first executive committee of the society gave way to a new one consisting exclusively of the animators. This committee now looks into the accounts, plans the monthly budget and takes decisions regarding staff appointment and running of the programmes. The programme coordinator is only an ex-officio member of the committee with no voting powers.

This has been the first step towards making the RDS a people's programme. The animators are now participating actively in the preparation of learning materials and development of the curriculum. It is hoped that the day is not far off when the programme will become self-sufficient not only financially but in all other aspects as well.

The Programme

There are in all 30 schools run by the Rural Development Society in 30 villages located in the Chingleput Taluk of Chingleput District. The schools began functioning around 15 May 1980 and have now completed their second year. The total number of children between 6 and 14 years covered by the programme is 1211 of which 640 are boys and 571 girls. The enrolment per school varies from 25 to 65. Usually a single animator handles each centre. Where there are more than 50 children there are two animators to a school.

The duration of the course was not fixed in the beginning and the plan was to take the children as and when they joined, group them according to their ability level and help them learn at their own pace. As the children progressed, materials and aids to meet their learning needs were to be prepared. A child could leave after becoming literate, if that is what he wants to do, or he could stay on to learn further. The Open University courses conducted in Tamil by the Madurai Kamaraj University are a blessing for non-formal education programmes like this one, since those children who do wish to go ahead up to the university level now have an opportunity to do so.

Financial help for running the programme is provided by a secular organisation in West Germany. The cost per child works out to Rs.178 a year or roughly Rs.15 per month. The initial project period was three years ending December 1982 and it is already planned to meet future project costs from local fund raising villages and also from the proposed income-generating programmes of the RDS.

Training

The animators started the schools after a 10 day orientation and training programme. Thereafter, they have had ongoing training regularly for two days a month for the past two years.

The 10 day training programme was an attempt to orient the animators into understanding children, appreciating each child's uniqueness and worth and learning to respect the child's ability. It aimed at laying the foundation for an approach to learning, dramatically different from what the animator or the child would have experienced. The activities and experiences provided in the training had one main theme - to kindle in the animators a "sense of wonder" about children, their thinking, feeling and action, and learn about the methods and materials which would help sustain their natural curiosity, and help them learn.

Besides being introduced to basic concepts regarding teaching children, the animators were made to observe children in the age group 6-14 years and to attempt to get a glimpse of the child's world. They gave a critique of the present formal education system based on their personal experience and outlined how different the new schools would be. They did clay modelling, painting and collage, sang songs, prepared children's stories, put on plays, made puppets and aids for teaching literacy and numeracy, gathered objects from the surrounding environment and discussed how they could be used as teaching aids. In addition, material was given to them to read and widen their knowledge about what the teaching of children involved.

The monthly two-day meetings serve as a forum for animators to exchange their classroom experiences, discuss the learning difficulties of children and how to overcome them, the problems they face in communicating with the children, the practical difficulties faced in handling a class of children in a variety of age-groups and levels and in the usage of aids. On these occasions they are also initiated into understanding the process of learning, psychology of child teaching and educational philosophies. Fresh ideas are brought in by the participation of resource persons from outside. For instance, the RDS invited Cathy Spagnoli who introduced the concept of rhythm to the animators and taught them how to use body movements to make children open out. She also exposed them to a wide range of songs in many different languages. A visitor may be surprised to find a harijan child in a remote village of Chingleput sing 'Che Che Kole', a tribal song from Africa. A craft teacher from Bal Bhavan taught them how to make beautiful articles from ordinary materials; there was another craft master who introduced making moulds and dolls - the list is a long one.

These meetings vitalise the programme by re-kindling the sense of wonder in the animators. There is always something new to learn about teaching children.

After the first few months the animators expressed their lack of confidence in handling science and arithmetic lessons since they were themselves not qualified in, or aware of, many of the basic concepts. This was when the RDS realised that the information base of animators needed to be strengthened if the schools were to run as visualised. If the animator lacked basic knowledge of the subject and was not grounded in the fundamentals, he could not be expected to teach the children imaginatively. They often resort to making the children learn by rote and give unintelligible information from a book. This method will obviously not be able to hold the attention of the children, who will then not find the classes either challenging or appealing. Untimately, discipline will degenerate into ordering and caning.

In every monthly meeting therefore, some time has been set apart to provide imaginative experiences for learning science and arithmetic concepts for the animators. It now makes more sense to them when they hear of teaching science through the "discovery" method as they have experienced it themselves.

Of late, one session is spent on getting to know more about what is happening in the world today - politically, economically and socially. Current news from papers or periodicals is compiled by one of the staff and is given to the group for reading and discussion.

The RDS started with a group of young people from the villages whom many would have considered ill-equipped to teach children imaginatively. But they understand their children well, are enthusiastic about the task they undertake and above all are open to new ideas, willing to work very hard and eager to learn. If what the children and their parents say is to be believed, the animators in the RDS night schools are better teachers than their counterparts in the local village schools.

The Curriculum

The curriculum was planned with the major objectives of the programme in mind. The child should sustain his innate sense of wonder about the world around him. This sense of wonder should be kept alive and channelled to acquire mastery over learning, language and numeracy and other useful skills by expressing himself creatively. This would be done by providing the child with creative learning experiences.

It is difficult to imagine the kind of handicaps that a child from a socially and economically deprived background has. He or she has probably never seen a printed book in the first five years of life and is not familiar with the written word. Even pictorial representations of three dimensional objects are difficult to comprehend. The child has never been asked questions nor has had an opportunity for anything more than basic communication. Life for the child has very few avenues for expressing imagination and developing latent creativity. Being burdened with adult responsibilities from an early age, the child has ceased to be a child in the real sense of the word.

Given this situation in the RDS school understandably the emphasis has been on creative activities such as games, music, dance and story telling, drawing, painting and clay moulding. Activities were designed to involve the child prior to the introduction of the actual alphabet. Aids were prepared and introduced in the following sequence as a necessary pre-literacy stage.

Step 1: The two dimensional forms of familiar objects to just identify the objects;

Step 2: Another set of the two dimensional forms of the same objects to match with the first set of objects;

Step 3: Two sets of two dimensional forms of objects which are very much similar but still different to match, to develop facility for subtle discrimination and identification;

Step 4: Slightly more abstract two dimensional pictures (a set of four and another one which is identical with one of the four pictures). The single picture is to be matched with its pair in the group of four; and

Step 5: A series of pictures each depicting an event in a story for helping them to serialise them and see the continuity.

After this, simple words representable pictorially were introduced. The children learnt words, then letters comprising them and used these letters in other combinations to form new words.

In numeracy, the basic concepts were introduced through children's experiences with concrete objects followed by the teaching of number symbols.

Learning about the environment was through the scientific process of observation, experiment, recording, inference and generalisation. It was planned that at a later stage plays and stories, role playing and simulation games would be used to help the children view their lives and milieu critically and to contemplate how they could work towards changing these.

The curriculum as we see it is different from that of formal schools only in one essential sense. While the formal school curriculum seems to operate in a vacuum, closing eyes to the context in which it functions, the RDS schools seek to highlight the context and help the children reflect critically on it. But this is only in addition to their learning the basic skills imparted in any well run formal school.

The Method

At first only aids and teacher guides were given to the teachers. This soon turned out to be a disaster. The animators had begun to teach children the alphabet and numerals by rote since that is what the villagers expected a "proper teacher" to do. As far as literacy was concerned, reaction was elicited by introducing words (illustrated with pictures) before teaching the alphabet. A frequent question raised by the community was how could one introduce words before teaching the letters. Apart from that, there should be sequential learning of the alphabet; the method to them was strange, to say the least. Teaching through games and aids was not considered "real teaching" by the parents. They thought that only a teacher who talked all the time was doing his job. The animators who felt insecure without textbooks and the usual paraphernalia succumbed to the villagers' pressures.

There was also severe opposition from the parents for activities like clay modelling. They felt that it was only because these children were from backgrounds where "they have to soil their hands in agricultural labour" that the teachers dared to ask them to work with clay. All these are forgotten events now, and parents pride themselves on how well-versed their children are in singing, or how clever they are with their hands.

The RDS had to reach a compromise. It was decided that language would be introduced through words. But the words would be in alphabetical order. Aids and activities for language, arithmetic and science formed the main tools for learning.

Textbooks containing the activities mentioned in teachers' guides had to be designed and introduced in accordance with the suggestions of the animators. For reasons not easily explicable the animators have found it easier conducting activities if they are in textbooks which children keep, than guides which they have to go through.

Project Evaluation

The programme is founded on trust and respect for all who are a part of it. External evaluation of a supervisor sitting in judgement has never been a part of it. It is acknowledged that the entire team is experimenting with something new and can only learn through trial and error. Self-evaluation therefore would be the best course.

The animators are helped by the assistant coordinators in running their centres effectively. They fill in weekly records giving details of the class and activities. These are consolidated from time to time and the animators are given a feedback on their progress. Discussions are held on the remedial measures and follow-up action taken.

Pupil Evaluation

For the children, there are no regular examinations or tests. The animator or the coordinator makes a note of the progress of different children through classroom observation. If, for example, half the class is found to be unable to identify numbers beyond a hundred, the animators group in the monthly meeting discusses the kind of regrouping which needs to be done, the additional aids to be prepared and how help can be given to this set of children.

There is no "passing" or "failing" and no "clever" and "dull" children in these classes. The actual benefits of this will only be visible in the long run. For the present, it can only be said that while the formal school was a place to fear, the alternative school has become a place children enjoy.

The Children's Summer Fair

Any account of the RDS schools would be incomplete without the mention of the marathon children's summer fair held in May 1981, to mark the first anniversary of the starting of the alternative schools.

All the approx. 1,200 children of the RDS schools assembled at the vast open grounds of Sembakkam village, along with some of the youth and elders of each of their villages. They were there for three days - from 1 to 3 May 1981. The children were engaged in creative activities - they drew, painted, made collages, articles from palmyra leaves and dolls from metal wire and rope. Every school put up an item in the cultural evening that lasted nearly five hours. There was a science exhibition where the children could do simple experiments with ordinary things (like making a lens with glass and water). There were fun parlours, a couple of merry-go-rounds and shops with delicious eats. There was a film show and a magic show as well.

To the children, it was an experience which was the first of its kind and is still fresh in their memory. For the animators, it was, as one of them said; "proof of just how much all of us animators could do through months of toil and cooperative effort. A year later, it still seems too good to be true." And for all the others who witnessed the children's activities, it brought home the truth that even children from very deprived backgrounds had immense potential which is often untapped.

To keep up with the tradition started with the 1981 summer fair, and to commemorate the second anniversary of the RDS alternative schools, a science exhibition was held in May 1982 in three village centres, to which children from all the other RDS schools came. There were charts and models and slide shows on the solar system, evolution of life, plants and animals and man - how the human body functions and what causes basic malfunctions.

Community Participation

From the beginning, the involvement of the community in the running of the schools was considered to be of primary importance. Since the NAEP was being run in all the villages, the community was acquainted with the persons who started the Rural Development Society. In many cases it was the people themselves who had suggested that there be night schools for children in place of or at least in addition to classes for adults. There was a community meeting in every village once this plan was crystallised. An agreement was reached that the villagers who were interested in having the alternative schools would allocate the land and construct a thatched hut which would house the school. All the schools were built by the community. The villagers therefore feel responsible and claim their right to determine the running of the schools.

When the schools began, parents of many of the children who came to school would come regularly and observe what was going on to make suggestions and give the animator a helping hand whenever needed. The organisation is deeply involved in the villagers' lives. The interactions range from informal meetings to organised discussion of issues, role playing and staging of street theatre.

A meeting of village elders from all the villages was called to discuss steps through which the villagers could start playing a decisive role in the running of the schools. It was suggested that village committees be formed which would be responsible for ensuring that the school functions regularly for the benefit of the children, provide some financial support to the school through collection of grain from the community after harvest, and also enable villagers to participate in the activities of the school, by identification of resource persons from among themselves who could teach the children music, dancing and various skills.

The school has become a base from which many other activities emanate. Whenever there is an issue to be discussed, the villagers assemble near the school after the class hours and discussions take place around the petromax lamp. Regular discussion sessions also take place in many villages as part of the follow-up programme for adults. News clippings about major events and issues concerning them and their relation to the people's present down-trodden situation are discussed. These discussions are open-ended and are intended more for strengthening critical awareness than for solving immediate problems.

The school has provided the cheri people links with 30 other villages through their respective animators. More than once, a problem faced by a particular cheri has been solved through the involvement of all the animators who succeeded in bringing it to the notice of the authorities concerned.

In the last year, a drama group was formed from among the animators. They have been staging plays using "street play" techniques in all the villages at regular intervals. The plays centred around the life of the villagers highlighting their lives critically. For example, in one of the plays, there is one part where the poor harijan who works as padiyal for a big landowner needs a loan and promises to send his son for padi work in return. The mother who is keen that their son should study has sent him away to school. The padiyal fights with his wife, goes to the school room, abuses the teacher for taking the child away from work and spoiling him, says: "He would do better earning 10 rupees a month grazing cattle - at least he will eat, " and drags the child away from school.

This scene simultaneously brings an uproar of laughter and comments like "they are only depicting what is happening here." After the play there are usually discussions on why the poor are compelled to deny their children some of their basic needs and are so badly exploited. In some of the villages, the plays have led to formation of youth "Sangams" or associations with a view to co-operative action to improve their lot.

The RDS 'Alternative Schools' are thus more than just places where working children come to study in the evenings. They are centres of action for the development of the community as a whole.

PEOPLE'S PRIMARY SCHOOL - SAVAR GONOPATHSALA

Sayeda Rowshan Qadir

Introduction

Primary education is now recognised as a fundamental right of all people. Whether the communities which are actually deprived of educational opportunity, particularly poorer parents, think of it as a basic or primary need for their children is a different question. What is important is that these communities have come to recognise that education does not mean employment and that the present system of education alienates children from work. In reply to a question "why she did not send her children to school", in a survey (1), an earning mother replied "the school does not provide him or her food, but working somewhere else he or she can procure food". For a poor parent, the primary need for children is to provide food first, not education. They think that education does not provide any solution to children's practical life. Since primary education is imparted in full-time schools and children of the vast majority of rural families have to work for their survival, for all practical purposes these children have no access to primary education.

The National Setting

The above represents a picture of today's Bangladesh, the major part of the land that was Bengal, well known even in this century as the most intellectually advanced and affluent in the sub-continent. The tragedy is that today's Bangladesh formed the primary producing hinterland for the city and factories of Calcutta until the partition in 1971, achieved through a devastating liberation war, found the territory "lagging behind ... in many areas of life" (2). The close of the 1970s, according to official records, witnessed all the problems of "poverty, malnutrition, unemployment and illiteracy" (3), with 85 per cent of the population subsisting below the poverty line. About 90 per cent of population is rural, of which 50 per cent are landless agricultural labourers.

The educational scene has also been dismal according to expert opinion. The so-called development policies and action followed for more than two decades until recently on the iniquitous base of the social structure in

effect contributed to polarising disparities of income and education. Only in recent years is an attempt being made to genuinely universalise education. From 1947 to 1980, the increase in enrolment in primary schools has been only 132 per cent compared to 3400 per cent in higher education (4). The rate of literacy is only 27 per cent for males and 13 per cent for females. Only 58 per cent of the primary school age population 6-10 enrol in schools, and of these 50 per cent drop out before completing grade V. A national survey revealed that while 30 per cent of the families belonging to the upper layer sent all their children to primary school, 56 per cent in the bottom sent none of their children to school (5).

In a recent learned paper, Chowdhury calls education in Bangladesh 'dysfunctional' (4). Primary education does not help the child to affirm his relations with nature and other ecological forces and as such does not impart receptiveness to change. Secondary education alienates an individual from traditional society, but does not reintegrate him with the modern sector. Institutions of higher education have become the 'constitutional refuge' of the disguised unemployed. That the education system is not productive is attested by the fact that while Japan with only 8.4 million acres of rice land and 24 per cent of its population in agriculture has a rice surplus after meeting the food requirements of its 100 million population, Bangladesh with 23 million acres of the rice land and 70 per cent of its population on farms is unable to feed its 85 million people (6).

The Locale and the Agency

The Gonoshvastha Kendra (GK) (people's health centre) where the Gonopathshala (GP) (people's primary school) is located is in Savar, 22 miles from the city of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Savar is also a thana - an administrative unit equivalent to a county. According to the 1974 census the population of Savar thana was around 200,000. The thana consisted of 300 villages and 12 Union Parishads (the lowest tier of local government) - a Union comprises 10-12 villages with populations ranging from 12 to 20,000. GK is located in the Pathalia Union, on the highway connecting Dhaka with the northern districts. Some modern industries and a university have come up alongside the highway. Still the thana is primarily rural and depends on agriculture, and as in other rural areas of Bangladesh, the people of Savar thana are generally poor, illiterate, and suffer from malnutrition and ill-health.

GK was started as a modest health centre in 1978 to provide medical care to the people of the surrounding areas. The founder was Dr. Zafarullah Chowdhury, a young medical doctor, who actively participated in the liberation war of 1971 and drew his experience from organising medical camps and care of the wounded. Gradually an intensive health programme developed with centres and village based paramedics, a health insurance scheme, and preventive and curative services. Soon it was realised that health-care alone would not solve the people's problem; indeed, as GK's 1974-75 Progress Report noted, over-population and illiteracy are symptoms of the poverty syndrome. This led GK to work towards a programme of socio-economic development. It instituted some income-generating activities at the centre like Gonoshilpalaya (People's workshop), Nari Kendra

(women's centre), Gono Paduka (people's shoe industry), Gono Krishi Khamar (people's farm), etc. While these activities have been taken up, the emphasis of GK continues to be on family planning and health care. As Manzoor Ahmed has pointed out GK has set impressive examples of integration of curative medical services, preventive health care and family planning, and has also integrated these with the various socio-economic activities. Another sphere in which GK has broken new ground is community participation and effective training of workers at the base level (7).

In 1972, a scheme of non-formal adult education for men and women was introduced by GK. The classes were held in the afternoon and evening. A teacher was appointed from the locality. In course of time, discussions revealed that this education seemed useless as it did not enable them to raise their income. The older people suggested that education should be given to children who had their whole life before them and further it should have some economic opportunities as well. This experience with adult males led GK to institute their education progamme for children. GK workers held extensive discussions with villagers for opening a school for children. They collected information from twelve government primary schools and undertook a house to house survey in neighbouring villages (8).

This survey helped them to identify problems of school age children. It was found that about 70 per cent of them were admitted to class I and II of the government schools in the villages. But only 33 per cent of these entrants stayed in class III, and just 13 per cent continued in class V. The students of class V belonged to well-to-do families. The timetable which was followed by government schools was not suitable for the majority of village families. Some poor families could not afford to send children to a school because the parents depended on the earnings of children employed as domestic servants or shepherds. The prevailing education system contributed little to alleviate their daily problems.

The findings of the survey helped workers to map out an education plan which would not alienate students from the realities of their life and would help the families directly or indirectly.

Gonopathsala - People's School

Realising that the structures of the country still oppress the children of the poor, the philosophy behind the school is to educate the children of their own community. Gonopathsala's primary purpose is to spread education among the children of landless and marginal farmers who otherwise have no opportunity for education. It is to engage students in activities - in addition to studies - which would preserve interests and skills considered valuable by their families (9).

Gonopathsala started with 50 students in 1977; the number has increased to 286 in 1982. The school received government recognition in October 1981. This ensures that at the end of their study at Gonopathsala students would be able to get admission to other schools. The authorities of GK have not accepted government assistance to avoid unnecessary intervention as it is their aim to build the institution in a spirit of self-reliance.

The Pathsala is situated within the campus of GK. It covers approximately 2.5 acres including a spacious courtyard, used as a playground for the students. The school comprises two big rooms subdivided into 7 rooms. One room has mud walls with corrugated iron sheets on the roof, the floor is of earth; the other big room is fenced in by bamboo. The Pathsala has a floor space of approximately half an acre. In the classroom students and teachers sit on mats. The furniture includes one table, three chairs (in the teachers' common room), three blackboards and one cupboard. These are the physical facilities provided for 286 students and six teachers in Gonopathsala. They have a tubewell and the necessary toilet facilities, a field to work and play where the children have swings which they use in between class hours. The students have their own wall-board for information about the villages, and news on health and nutrition. Students are given a boldly printed survey sheet for village information which they fill up in their own hand and discuss in the class. This exercise helps to raise their consciousness about the village social structure and their own place in it.

The Teaching Programme

The method which is followed by teachers and students of Gonopathsala is quite different from other primary schools of the country.

Classes are held five days a week (from Wednesday to Sunday) instead of six as in other primary schools in the country. Monday the teachers go to the villages supervising or conducting the classes there. Students of classes III to V are required to hold classes in the villages for those children who cannot come to the school site. Perhaps this is an indicator of the form that the school will gradually assume - the building may serve as the initial training ground, with some students staying longer than others, while the village becomes the accepted site of a regular school programme (10).

The premises of the school are used in three shifts: (i) orientation of the adult women workers of GK, (ii) orientation of the adult workers of GK who live on the campus and (iii) orientation of the students for whom Gonopathsala has been initiated. The daily routine, Wednesday through Sunday, of the Gonopathsala teachers is given on page 83.

The Daily Routine of the Gonopathsala Teachers

6.00 to 7.30 a.m.	Work in the fields.
7.30 to 9.00 a.m.	Bath and breakfast.
9.00 to 10.15 a.m.	Assembly of students, orientation of local workers engaged in various projects of GK, supervision of students in agricultural work, sending students for work in selected development projects of GK.
10.15 to 11.00 a.m.	Classes of I, II and III and supervision of children's games.
11.00 to 12.00 noon	Students take bath, and younger children have lunch. Teachers supervise. The older students help younger ones in taking bath and serving food in groups.
12.00 to 1.00 p.m.	Nursery and baby classes. Teachers supervise while students of classes IV and V teach.
1.00 to 2.00 p.m.	Lunch break. Older students and teachers lunch together.
2.00 to 4.00 p.m.	Classes IV and V.
4.00 to 5.00 p.m.	Students leave school premises and teachers evaluate the day's activities.
5.00 to 6.30 p.m.	Rest and relaxation.
6.30 to 8.00 p.m.	Classes for the illiterate workers of different projects of GK.

Gonopathsala in the Integrated GK System

The Gonopathsala operates as an integral and essential part of the system. The routine presented above is synchronised with interlinked activities of other projects, viz. health care, agriculture, metal workshop, centre for women's vocational training, shoe factory, restaurant and bakery, woodwork and publications. The nucleus of these activities involving production, training and extension is located in the main centre which has substantially expanded in area to include crop and horticultural land,

fish ponds, workshops, buildings for the health complex, a modern pharmaceutical factory, hostels and family accommodation for the GK workers etc. So far the spread in the spheres of health and agriculture (through formation of groups of the poor) has been noteworthy. In other fields, such as rural industry or establishment of co-operatives, things have remained in an experimentation stage. More than 300 men and women have come under direct GK employment.

People at GK are deeply conscious of the problems of transferability of the results achieved in their organisation, for they look at GK as a replicable model. The main characteristics of their programmes have been well identified: ensuring better health, increasing production and income through people's own organisation and management, training and education, and above all conscientisation. For this purpose, centres and activities have been established in interior villages. However, the task has not been smooth. Occasionally, there is serious opposition, even violence from vested interests. GK utilises incidents of violence to intensify their activities aimed at conscientisation.

Working Conditions

There are two kinds of GK workers - Centre based and village based. Life for all the GK workers is rigorous, particularly for those based at the Centre. Discipline is strict and routine demanding. The programme of work, from very early morning till nightfall, as mentioned in the timetable above, is compulsory for all residing at GK. Visitors are restricted, and respite in the form of holidays and vacations is scarce. Engagement of peons and servants is forbidden for all levels - executives, managers, section heads, teachers. Whatever be the educational level of the workers any semblance of elitism calls for immediate disqualification. There are stringent expectations from newly married couples both in regard to size of family, limited to not more than two, as well as to spacing of births. Nothing is free in GK system, but the resident workers get things cheaper, e.g. food produced in the Centre by their own labour. Accommodation is modest but rates are reasonable. On the whole, compared to salaried positions elsewhere with similar qualifications, GK workers appear to be better off. However, the rigour of life has compelled quite a number of workers to leave GK.

There is an enormous amount of interaction and participation among all workers. Project committees which comprise a combination of members from different projects must meet at least once in a week. It is compulsory for all workers to be present at the monthly general meetings. All decisions regarding the course of action of GK, service conditions of workers, discipline etc. are taken in the general meetings. The meetings take place in the evening and tend to get prolonged until early morning, since intensive debates are encouraged before arriving at a decision. The decision regarding the size of the family and spacing of children, for example, has been taken in the general meeting. Decisions regarding pay scales, leave rules, inter-project transfers, promotions, incentives for devotion to work in the form of advance increments, etc., are taken in the general meeting.

General staff conditions naturally apply in Gonopathsala as well. Regular meetings are held among teachers, and between teachers and students. Virtually all evenings are spent in evaluating the work of the day and planning the next day's programme. Teachers have to teach in schools, organise adult education classes and have to supervise the young students in the villages. All are required to read prescribed books, mainly for conscientisation, and to discuss them in compulsory group meetings. The older students of the Gonopathsala also share in the knowledge gleaned from such readings.

Special Features of Gonopathsala

As is evident from the preceding, GK is a rather unusual institution. It explores modes of development which are suited for the poorest sections in developing countries. Owing to the importance given to education and training by GK, Gonopathsala, although it is just one of the activities of GK, and not the most prominent one, has a special place of importance in the GK system. It is appropriate to review the important features of Gonopathsala and to draw certain conclusions on that basis.

(1) Community Education

The opening song which is sung by other government primary schools is the national anthem 'My golden Bangla, I love you', but in Gonopathsala students start the day singing 'We are all kings'. In the teachers' view the song helps to motivate the students to maintain self-esteem and to dream of a society based on equality, self-reliance and self-respect. No religious education is imparted. The basic philosophy is that the child should grow up as human being rather than a Muslim, Hindu or Christian.

The school authority combines family chores with school work. The students are permitted to bring to school cattle and goats, and keep them in the school field while they attend classes. On their way back they take their cattle home and also collect firewood and cowdung. There is no bar to carrying to school the work which they are supposed to do at home. In this manner the main disincentives to the enrolment of children in schools are overcome. Even more important, children are encouraged to engage themselves in productive and remunerative work and to develop skills which are of economic value to the family.

To make the students useful to the families, to inculcate in them an appropriate attitude towards manual labour, and to prepare them for the world of work, 10-12 year old boys and girls are given vocational training for 2-3 hours per day. (Four are in carpentry and six in metal work.) After 2-3 months training, when they are capable of doing productive work they are given a modest payment (TK 2, equivalent to

10 cents in terms of US currency) which is kept in their own savings fund for the future. The students also engage in poultry breeding. They take 12 week chicks home to raise on the condition that they will return two to other school students when their chicks hatch. This also encourages a spirit of co-operation. They work also in the agricultural field in the school, clean the courtyard, latrines and the poultry farm. The main idea behind this is to prepare students to do all types of work for the family and the community.

(2) Teacher Student Relationship

The relationship between students and teachers is very cordial. No punishment is allowed in the school - beating is totally prohibited. Teachers and students sit on the same mat together, discuss problems without any hesitation. Students insist on teachers playing with them in the field . Students sometimes argue with teachers on certain issues. A case may be cited. Ishaque, aged 13, a student of class IV, did not do his share of work in the agricultural field at the school. He was called by the teachers who tried to convince him of his remissness. His conduct was discussed by all the students, then with the approval of the students things were settled amicably.

(3) Development of Group Feeling

The students always work and study in groups. For convenience, the 286 students are divided into 21 groups. They are free to choose the group. A member's success or failure is considered as the group's success or failure. The whole group also feels responsible for an individual's faults. Training in first aid is given to each group so that they can jointly prove useful to the villagers in the time of need. Group training ensures that group members look at themselves not as individuals but principally as a group. Leaders generally of classes IV and V are elected in an open general meeting of students and teachers. Leaders, then, select their group members in consultation with the teachers. In monthly meetings, student leaders are given reports of the groups' problems and prospects.

In a country which traditionally treats people who do manual work as inferior, it is natural that the children of Gonopathsala should be subjected to derisive comment from certain sections of the village community. Gonopathsala does place more importance on manual work and on income generating activity in comparison to book learning. However, if the students of Gonopathsala were not studying there, they would have remained outside school. GK attempts to deal with this situation by developing among the students a sense of worth and the students of Gonopathsala consider themselves as a separate class of people.

This feeling is further sharpened through a variety of conscientisation type activities and programmes. On the whole, it can be said that most of the students of Gonopathsala grow up with a critical consciousness about their own predicament and about their environment.

(5) Syllabus, Teaching Practice and Evaluation

Up to now the school is using textbooks prescribed for government schools, which they know are irrelevant for their students. The school authority is seriously thinking of new curriculum and textbooks for students. Though the teachers follow the textbooks prescribed by government they teach in their own way. Government textbooks are supplemented by readings from newspapers and other suitable books and improvised material considered useful for the students.

As mentioned earlier, classes are held in two shifts for nursery to class II from 9.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon; for classes III - V from noon to 3.00 p.m. The former class is taken by the students of classes III - V, with teachers serving only as overseers while engaged in other work.

Every night teachers discuss their classes for the next morning and decisions are made on their lessons. There is an elaborate class routine and care is taken to complete textbooks that are prescribed for primary schools in the country. There are many ways in which students are evaluated. Older students have to be familiar with their textbooks. Younger students start with 'things' and 'environment' and are made to acquaint themselves well with the mother tongue, Bangla, through reading, writing and understanding. Emphasis is placed on self-development, village survey, health, cleanliness, etc. Their ability to apply what they learn is evaluated. Leadership qualities are also judged. Such evaluation takes place every week. At monthly meetings students and teachers report on their activities. Depending on progress made a student may receive even two or three promotions in a year.

(6) Instruction by Students

Students of classes IV and V are expected to teach younger children, especially girls, who cannot come to Gonopathsala or attend the government school. These classes are organised in groups of 8 - 12. Instruction is mostly imparted through games - with wood blocks (produced in the GK carpentry shop), marbles, leaves, roots and other material available in the villages. Children also learn something about health, sanitation and environment, including agriculture. These children in turn often transmit their knowledge to parents.

Students also teach adult men and women, either along with children or separately. They are taught to write their names and signatures, numbers, the alphabet and simple sentences. Instruction is also provided on subjects of health and hygiene. Adults feel no hesitation in learning from children. Children feel enthused when

their teachers come to supervise their work. Although classes are held regularly, supervision by teachers tends to be irregular. The headmistress told the author during discussions that the situation may improve soon with the appointment of more teachers. Villagers are happy about the work done by the students for the village and have developed a sense of community feeling. Some of them however consider that the children are not learning enough.

(7) Students and Teachers

Students come to Gonopathsala from 19 surrounding villages. Approximately 90 per cent of them graze their cattle in the normal hours (many of them bring cattle to school). The students come from the poorest section of society and the parents of these children are all illiterate. They want their children to receive education, but their financial condition does not permit them to send children to government schools. The parents complain that in those schools, in spite of free primary education, there is considerable expenditure on books, stationery, clothing, etc. The parents admit that if Gonopathsala had not given their children an opportunity for education, it would not have been possible to educate them. They consider that Gonopathsala is rendering a vital service to the community by providing education to their children and the opportunity to learn skills which they perceive is of great use to their children.

Attendance at school varies with the rural calendar. It rises to 80 per cent in the lean season and drops to 30 per cent at harvest time. No restrictions exist regarding the time up to which the students may be admitted. Almost every day some new faces turn up. Teachers do not keep records of new entrants and it is difficult to know the actual number of students at a particular point of time. In reply to the question why they come to school, 90 per cent of the students said because they get one meal and the opportunity to develop skills. They hope that after being fully trained they will be able to get work in GK. Only 10 per cent of students said they get more attention in Gonopathsala. Practically all students said that they hope to continue their studies after class V.

The background of the teachers shows that they work in school for six months to a year and a half. During the last four years, there was a turnover of 16 teachers. The teachers belong to poor families. From interviews with teachers, an impression was gathered that although they are devoted to their work, they are not satisfied with their remuneration and find the working hours excessive. The rigour and strain of work was evident; when asked whether they would leave Gonopathsala if they got another job, all the teachers except the Headmistress said they would. Among the reasons they mentioned were lack of freedom, over-work, small salary, no vacation and harsh discipline.

Conclusion

The objectives, methods, structure and spirit of Gonopathsala indicate

certain important factors. The outstanding feature about Gonopathsala is that it serves the children of the poorer sections, the landless and marginal farmers. Students are not only charged no fees, they are given free lunch, books and stationery, and are covered by the excellent health-care services of GK. It is obvious that the sponsors of Gonopathsala have their own philosophy of education which values work-orientation and considers as important the raising of consciousness of the poor. As a result of linking schooling with production and the creation amongst the students of a new identity the Gonopathsala has raised among the pupils, and through them among their parents, a sense of worth and status, even if in concrete terms the economic condition of the family may not have improved. The parents of the children participate in the educational process through adult education programmes and visits of the teachers to the villages, and encouragement is given to the children to share and discuss their learning at home.

Can the experiment of Gonopathsala be replicated widely in Bangladesh? We must acknowledge a number of unique features in this institution. The most important of these is the devotion and spirit of the GK authorities. Perhaps even more important is the fact that the kind of education being imparted in Gonopathsala has been possible because it is a part of the GK system, which already had a rapport with the neighbouring villages, mainly due to their health-care programme.

Besides, the existence of a number of workshops and agricultural farms make it possible for skill training programmes to be organised alongside other courses. Another noteworthy thing is the high expectation from teachers. While these and some other unusual features make Gonopathsala programmes difficult to replicate, there are some characterisistics of Gonopathsala which can, perhaps, be replicated on a wide scale. The most important of these is student orientation (as against teacher-orientation, which is characteristic of formal schooling). School timing is adjusted according to the convenience of the students, school fields are allowed to be used for students' cattle and the fact that the students have to work for their family is fully recognised. A related aspect is the use of older students (of class IV and V) for teaching of adults and young children. While this has immense educational value, this also provides a suggestion regarding the manner in which schools with insufficient teachers may manage. While systematic skill training and health education activities may not be possible on a large scale, the approach to education as more than book learning has to become a part of all non-formal education programmes.

The Second Five Year Plan of Bangladesh aims at achieving universal primary education and mass literacy by 1985. This is a very ambitious target. The Government has already decided to organise non-formal education programmes for children and adults. There is much scope, therefore, to encourage innovation and to replicate successful innovations. Bangladesh is fortunate in having a number of innovative and experimental programmes and there is scope not only for their expansion, but also to learn systematically from their results.

Appendix .

Table 1: Distribution of students in Gonopathsala according to sex in 1977 to 1980

Admission		Continuation		Dropouts	
BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
103	115	89	83	14	32
= 218		= 172		= 46	

Table 2: Classwise distribution of students in Gonopathsala by sex (January 1982)

CLASS	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
Nursery	26	23	49
Baby	75	22	97
I	21	22	43
I	23	7	30
III	19	6	25
IV	13	11	29
V	6	7	13
TOTAL	188	98	286
	(65.73)	(34.27)	(100.00)

Appendix 2

Table 3: Background of Teachers in Gonopathsala

	NAME WITH AGE	EDUCATION	DURATION AT GONOPATHSALA (YEAR)	LOCAL OR OUTSIDER	SALARY (TK.)	ACCOMMODATION
1)	Shamsunnahar (28) (Bachelor)	B.Sc.	1½ years	Outsider	600	Inside GK
2)	Mrs Fatema Begum (Separated)	S.S.C.	11 months	"	300	"
3)	Krishna Saha	S.S.C.	6 months	"	225	"
4)	Hoshne Ara (Divorcee)	S.S.C.	11 months	"	225	"
5)	Runu Acharyza (Married)	VIII	12 months	local	225	Outside GK
6)	Shandya Rani	VIII	12 months	local	225	"

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SHRAM NIKETAN: EDUCATION AS LIVING EXPERIENCE

A.K. Roy

Introduction

Whenever problems are encountered in the progress of a society towards objectives set by those who govern that society, experts automatically turn towards education as a means of overcoming those problems. Education is regarded as a well spring of new values, moralities, attitudes and techniques. But perhaps it is necessary to distinguish between an "educational system" and "education". No matter what is expected of "education", eventually it is the "educational system" that will have to act as the channel for achieving those expectations. And every system has its own built-in limitations. In that respect the educational system in India is very much a part of the social system. Just as the social system has been unable to benefit the Harijan (lower castes) and the Adivasi (tribal), indeed, in general, it has further deprived and pauperised them, so the educational system has been unable to rid the country of the design imposed upon it over 150 years ago. Experiments in non-formal education are often drawn into the same apparatus by requiring that non-formal learners go through the same formal examinations. Any changes that are brought about within the system - as the experts themselves confess - are because of the presence of "devoted and dedicated" teachers. But these devoted and dedicated women and men have to operate within the limitations set by the educational system in which they survive.

This study attempts to look at what a devoted and dedicated individual, outside the educational system, can do in non-formal education. There are many weaknesses in such work - principal among them being the inability to replicate itself. However, it is included in the conviction that this study may add to our knowledge of the dynamics of a truly non-formal pattern of education.

National Perspective

The national perspective on universalisation of education is based on Article 45 of the Indian Constitution adopted in 1949, which stipulated that free and compulsory education should be provided to all children up to the age of 14 by 1959. However, now in 1982 all

children in the age group 6-11 have not been drawn into the schools. The national average for primary school enrolment is 85 per cent and in the case of a State like Madhya Pradesh it drops to 63 per cent. The position in the 11-14 group is much worse, with 40 per cent being the national average and the Madhya Pradesh figure being 28 per cent. Different Commissions and Committees have periodically deliberated on this question over the years and have suggested schemes to overcome the problem. They have all, to a large extent, identified the problems as the non-availability of educational facilities and the non-enrolment even where educational facilities exist. According to the experts, there has been a tremendous expansion in educational facilities but this has been negated by the equally tremendous population growth. At the same time the main reason for non-enrolment has been identified as the poverty of families who are forced to treat the child as an economic asset rather than send her or him to school. From such reasoning it becomes apparent that: (a) where educational facilities have expanded they have catered for those who can afford to send their children to school; and (b) even if much greater expansion were undertaken, education would still not reach the poor unless the conditions of their poverty are changed. Most of the government schemes have, however, tried to solve the problem by administrative and curricular reforms with increased allocation of funds. Fundhave attempted to tackle the inter-relationship with poverty, far less to understand it.

In the State of Madhya Pradesh (MP) there have been four schemes designed over the last eight years to extend non-formal education to more children. The earliest of these was begun in 1975 and is a result-oriented model linked with the formal education system, being tried out in all the districts of MP under jurisdiction of the District Education Officers and the Basic Teacher Training Institutes. The instructional work for children is generally held in the schools outside normal school timings, either in the morning or in the evening. Each centre is designed to cater for 40 students and is provided with funds for books, slates, chalks, lanterns and a box. The teacher is provided with a contingent fund of RS. 250 for three months and an honorarium of Rs.50 per candidate passing the 5th class examination and Rs.100 for each student passing the 8th class examination.

The second scheme was started in 1979 by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in the Rajgarh and Bhopal districts through its Regional College of Education, Bhopal and the Field Adviser, NCERT. They provide training to teachers on the basis of the curriculum developed by NCERT. These teachers are paid Rs.150 per month to run non-formal education centres and their work is overseen by a supervisor who is paid Rs.350 per month. The centres also prepare children for the final examination of the 5th class of the formal schooling system.

The "Panghat Yojana" scheme was initiated in 1979 in Hoshangabad district focusing on village uplift through the education of children

and adults. For those desirous of joining the educational mainstream it links non-formal instruction with the formal system. There is further provision in the scheme for participation of the community in deciding the objectives and content of education.

The fourth scheme "Earn while you Learn" started in 1981. Earlier it was tried in some secondary schools on an experimental basis by providing looms at the school for students to work on and earn some income for their schooling. This has now been extended to the non-formal education centres in the hope that the economic motivation would attract more children in the age group 10-14.

All these schemes are connected with the formal schooling system either through examinations or through the school teachers. None of them, except the "Learn while you Earn" scheme in a marginal way, has tackled the basic nexus between poverty and non-education. There have been other non-formal education attempts by non-government organisations scattered throughout the State, but these too have, by and large, prepared learners for the formal schooling system. For success, all have depended heavily upon the dedication of the teacher, as otherwise all the usual problems of corruption, mismanagement, misappropriation of funds and false attendance registers would have crept in. On the other hand while repeatedly it is claimed that these schemes have reached the weaker sections, i.e. the tribals, harijans, and girls, there is, in fact, little supporting evidence.

The effort under the National Adult Education Programme has been massive with almost 5,000 non-formal education centres expecting to reach out to over 50,000 children in about 5 years. But in MP there are 70,883 villages and only 45,308 have primary schools. This means that perhaps 10 per cent of the villages with schools could have access even to non-formal education. Obviously, therefore, huge sections of tribal, backward and deprived areas remain deprived. It is within this perspective that we examine the case of a single individual, Shyam Bahadur Naura, and his miniscule effort in the village of Jamudi in Shahdol district of MP.

The Locale

Approximately 50 per cent of the population of Shahdol is tribal. The major tribes are Kol, Gond, Baiga and Bhuinya. While some of the tribes still attempt to eke out a meagre existence in the fast dwindling forests, others have moved into the phase of settled agriculture and others are fast swelling the ranks of the unemployed. The tribals have been historically dependent on the forests which have met a large range of their needs. In the face of massive deforestation and the consequent ecological damage, the situation is rapidly worsening. In general, however, their agricultural practices are primitive, so that even those who own sizeable tracts of land, are unable to derive much benefit from them. The level of irrigation is extremely low; coupled with the undulating terrain and paucity of water resources, the product from the land is pitiful.

Yet, it is only agriculture that can sustain the people, for the activities that are not directly related to agriculture sustain barely a tenth of the population. The region is rich in resources, mineral and forest. There are very rich deposits of coal and bauxite in the district, and mining is a major source of revenue to the government. The commercial and industrial development of the forests sustains paper manufacture at one of the largest modern paper mills in Asia. But the industrial townships, far from benefiting the region, have succeeded in colonising the surrounding areas, adding to the despoilation of the countryside. Products of the forests find their way to virtually every corner of the country to feed numerous manufacturing processes. The whole trade in these products is tightly controlled through a whole network of middlemen and their counterparts in the bureaucracy. It is typical of the pattern of hinterland areas: rich in resources, dominated by an outside immigrant section, with the tribal population in subjugation providing cheap labour, and the consequent backwardness in spite of the development of mining and manufacture.

The region has the potential for the cultivation of an amazing variety of crops: cereals, oilseeds, vegetables, fruit and fibres. Today, however, it is a monocrop economy with very low wages in agriculture, massive unemployment in the dry season, and very poor prospects of employment in alternative activities linked to the development of the region. Consequently, share-cropping and bonded labour practices are maintained through extortionate rates of interest on seed loans. These loans are primarily given by landlords and rich farmers to maintain their stranglehold over the labourers. Price manipulations in agricultural and forest products enable traders to reap rich profits through monopolistic trade.

On the face of it, the educational system seems quite impressive. In a district with 2150 villages, there are over 1000 primary schools, nearly 200 secondary schools and 36 higher secondary schools that feed students into 3 government colleges. Yet 85 per cent of the population is illiterate; the literate 15 per cent belongs mostly to the dominant classes and knows little beyond the arithmetic of profit and loss calculation. Teaching practices are irregular, outmoded and value-laden. Teachers use students for their personal errands; most instruction is imparted through the cane in preference to other pedagogic methods. The desperate economic plight of the poorest sections makes the attendance of their children at school virtually impossible. Youngsters have to pull their weight by collecting firewood, grazing cows, tending siblings and cooking food in the absence of their money-earning parents. Many teachers seek to lighten their own burden by placing further obstacles in the path of the poor: school uniforms and shoes, books and pens, assume disproportionate importance in the pedagogic process. At one school, the tribal student standing first in class was given a tin of shoe polish and a shoe brush for three consecutive years as a "prize", until he rebelled saying he did not have the money for a pair of shoes! It is not surprising, then, that members of the labouring classes

cannot make wage and earthwork calculations, do not understand weights and measures, and do not realise the enormous exploitation induced through the control of markets. Therefore, it is these labouring classes to whom a programme of non-formal education must reach.

Shyam Bahadur Naura

This was the environment within which Shyam Bahadur Naura , an "outsider" to the area, decided to start off the process of education. That was in 1977. It was an individual initiative taken at the end of nearly 20 years of experience gathered in a variety of educational institutions and social work agencies. In those 20 years, Naura had been a primary school teacher, a Gandhian worker, a participant in the J.P. (Jaya Prakash Narain) movement in Bihar and had identified the weakness of different kinds of formal and non-formal education. He wished to chalk out his own experiment. Since it was an individual experiment without institutional support, it was necessary that the survival of his family be generated in the course of the educational activity. This was the link between education and production; it was the process of production in agriculture which gave rise to conflicts, the analysis of which formed the content and shaped the development of the educational programme. Equally, it was production that made Naura acceptable to the community and sharpened his insight into the conflicts of development within the region. The educational tasks were shared between him and his wife.

Origin and Objectives of the Project

Naura's entry into the spirit of the educational experiment really began with his well. He wanted to dig a well on his land for irrigation purposes and approached the local bank for a loan under the Small Farmers' Scheme. He was duly given a loan but on condition that the well be dug to the bank's specifications. So, over a painful four months a well 20 feet wide and eighty feet deep was dug - but to no avail. The water was not even enough for drinking. So Naura approached the bank for another loan to dig a second well of his own design near a neighbouring rain-fed minor stream. The bank refused and demanded payment of the original loan. Naura had to fill up the first well (as it was in danger of collapsing and ruining the land near it) and to dig a second at his own cost. When he finally managed to get the second one ready and asked the Electricity Board for a connection for an electric motor pump-set, the Board refused on the grounds that the well was not dug where the bank had sanctioned it. Finally indignant at these repeated Catch-22 situations, Naura went on hunger strike in protest against the Board's decision. An agitated farmer population, suffering from many such similar experiences, fully supported him and the eventual installation of the electric line was regarded as not only a moral victory for Naura but a landmark for all farmers in the area.

Naura's original conception lay in the desire for non-institutionalised intervention in the social process. As explained by him, the continual opposition of interests in society make its influence felt on all the institutional structures within society; these institutions are then subverted to serve the interests of a dominant ideological trend, and the programmes of the institutions lose organic contact with the existence of the oppressed groups in society. Further, he felt that the educational institutions in society are unable to resolve the opposition between the survival needs of its oppressed members and their desire to acquire an education which they can use to project their own interests. As a result, they fall prey to the irrational and unscientific explanations created by a dominant ideology which they are unable to counter. Their own survival demands that they develop a scientific, materialist outlook which they can apply to the resolution of their own conflicts. They seek knowledge that can be put to immediate use, and this is the measure of value that can be attached to knowledge.

Naura specified his experiment as follows:

(i) Education has to be linked to production. Only then can it fulfil the survival needs of the educators and the learners. Understanding production and the social relationships that arise is the framework within which a scientific outlook can be developed.

(ii) Such a pedagogic process has to be non-institutionalised as it may lead to a direct questioning of the social relationship inherent within the production.

(iii) The freedom of the learner to ask questions is a part of the development of the scientific method; only then it is possible for the educator to take the student forward from the known towards the unknown. Formal education, with its emphasis on books and examinations, does not permit the development of this process of acquiring knowledge. Earlier experience in a 'model' school had shown Naura that this approach was effective in imparting instruction in the sciences, geography and history through the additional use of charts, maps, globes and pictures to make explicit the interconnections between events. In the training of teachers, too, it was repeatedly emphasised that the learner be guided from the known towards the unknown; but the inflexibility towards introduction of new techniques and the system of evaluating students were incompatible with the principle.

(iv) The earlier experience with a model school had also demonstrated that a dialogical approach, known as a "direct approach", helped the student in learning language and acquiring literacy, provided the dialogue could be related to the experiential background of the learner. These earlier

experiences were such as could be generalised, as the experiment had involved four experienced teachers and nearly 100-150 teacher trainees since the school had been attached to a teacher training institution.

Objectives

The experimental design had five major objectives:

(i) survival of the activist in the environment;

(ii) development of roots in the community, so that the conflicts that the activist would strive to resolve could be extended to cover other sections of the community;

(iii) education of the oppressed sections to take place even as they laboured for their survival;

(iv) pragmatic linkage with other individuals while maintaining the autonomy necessary for experimentation; and

(v) replicability in other environments.

Naura focused on the direct learning of the labourers as they constituted approximately the age category 11-16 years, setting the expected levels of learning as: (i) information on agricultural production techniques; (ii) scientific knowledge of biological process in nature; (iii) wage calculations, weight and volumes measurements; and (iv) a minimum ability to read and write.

The learning goals were empirically identified, within the framework of man-nature and man-man conflicts and problems as they have arisen in the region. The framework was evolved in order to plan for the resolution of conflicts, since the conflicts between man and man, and man and nature are interlinked. The learning goals chosen were, therefore, in the context of a much wider understanding of objective conditions obtaining in the region with

(i) children of marginal, small and middle farmers - the educational thrust was towards applying scientific techniques and planning for increased production;

(ii) children of landless labourers - it was directed towards understanding wage and quantity calculations, price mechanisms in markets; and

(iii) both groups - a more expanded world view built upon a materialistic explanation of phenomenon was an essential requirement.

Organisational Structure

The project is small, with Naura and his wife Anuradha forming the core of the team. It operates on a five acre plot of land which can support 20 workers round the year mainly through vegetable production activity. It is able to generate most of its running costs. All activities related to production are supervised by Naura. In addition, most of the non-formal educational activities have also been designed by him. Anuradha contributes through her participation in the formal and non-formal educational activities. The more advanced student workers help in the production activity by guiding the newer learners in acquiring skills and knowledge. They also conduct educational games and cultural activities, especially in the absence of the more experienced coordinators.

The experiment has no link with the formal system of education; it has a number of links, at an educational level, with many developmental problems of the region. The introduction of new techniques and scientific knowledge in agriculture is aimed at boosting agricultural production. There are many informal discussions on topics related to health, physiology and hygiene. These are pursued in order to create awareness of the social roots of many maladies and to encourage a more active response to problems of ill health. The importance of preventive health care over curative measures is also stressed. Diet and nutritional balance and control are emphasised, especially in the context of nature cure remedies which are cheap and easily practiced. Beneficial effects of fruit and herbs are explained, along with simple techniques to cure many minor ailments. Fruit and vegetable saplings grown on the farm by the learners are distributed amongst them so as to encourage the practice of diet control. A basic knowledge of the physiological and biological process is imparted in order to overcome the age old traditional practices which account for ill health through superstition. Ill health is often a primary cause of borrowing and consequent indebtedness. Further, the demonstration effect created by a model farm produces the conditions whereby other farmers are willing to experiment with modern farming.

Since the entire experiment is critically dependent on continued production, the problems of production demand immediate attention. Currently, since knowledge of production is restricted to one person, there is constant pressure on his time. Thus, the produce has to be marketed in a town, Anuppur, 9 kilometres away and since market prices of vegetables fluctuate daily, the marketing activity is also critical for farm economies. This leads to many coordination problems. Further, educational materials have to be constantly created and discussions guided so as to benefit the learners. Monitoring the link between production and evaluation also leads to coordination problems.

Non-Formal Characteristics

The most fundamental non-formal aspect of the experiment is its attempt to incorporate the educational process into the very existence of the oppressed. The real life situation of production provides the matrix for the educational process; it provides employment and livelihood to the learner, demands necessary discipline of the learner so much so, that in comparison, the discipline required for the educational process seems much easier. The stress is on the content of learning and its applicability to real life situations rather than the acquisition of degrees or credits. The gamut of learning ranges from physical exercises through educational games to cultural expression; both sexes participate in all the activities. Individual learners often find collective expression: there is one movie shown each month in the town nearby, preferably a movie which has some social impact on the learners. Occasionally, farm work is shelved in favour of a visit to a new place combined with a picnic. There is a great deal of scope for innovation and the development of a closer relationship between Naura and Anuradha, and the learners.

An Anecdote

Non-formal education can have its paradoxical situations too. For one monthly outing Naura took his learners to see a film. In this film the producer takes characters from the Indian epic, Mahabharata, and places them in a modern rural context to give the old good versus evil theme a contemporary twist. There is the young man who returns from the city chafing at the injustice he sees in the village. There is the bonded labourer who finally revolts against his bondage. There are the two brothers whose sister is abducted by the landlord. And there is the righteous younger brother of the landlord who is determined to see that the forces of good win after all. A pick-up truck was commandeered and all the learners went off singing to see the movie at the late night showing in a nearby town. It is difficult to specify what exactly they saw in the film and what role it played in their growing awareness but the trip back was full of animated discussion. And the next day all the learners did not turn up for work. They had, they announced through a spokesman, gone on 'strike'. A thoroughly disgruntled and discomfited Naura reluctantly agreed to a minor wage and bonus increase and the learners cheerfully came back to sing and dance at his door. Whether other real life situations would induce such cheer and whether other media will have similar correlatable impact are questions that further experimentation will have to resolve.

Economic, organisational and cultural difficulties arise from this approach to learning. Travel and entertainment place a severe burden on an overstrained farm budget. Remoteness of location poses difficulties of transportation. On the cultural level, the tribal heritage promotes a lack of curiosity; there is initially little interest in learning. This is especially noticeable in the girls, who come with a pre-conception that they cannot learn. Their initial

interest is therefore confined to earning wages. Then there are the difficulties of language and expression; segregation of sexes in work activity is found more acceptable than their integration. Girls marry early and are constrained to leave their families though they may have developed an interest in continuing their education. In addition, the tribal life style has not prepared the learners for regular attendance to either work or play; the habit is slow in developing.

Solutions to these difficulties have also been sought at the economic and cultural levels. A system of bonus has been introduced to encourage long-term interest in attendance. Thus, every day attended means an addition to the bonus stockpile, every day lost means a deletion of two days equivalent of bonus. For cultural involvement, interesting gains and variations are constantly introduced along with cultural activities like Karma (tribal dance). Constant rotation between the various production tasks is also done on a regular basis.

Community Participation

Community participation has been directed more towards learning than teaching. Middle and rich farmers in the surrounding villages are being attracted towards vegetable cultivation as they see greater cash benefits in comparison to cereal and traditional crop cultivation. They often visit the farm to learn, sometimes to advise, to share their experiences and to discuss problems related to production and marketing difficulties. Some have even gone to the extent of sending their sons and daughters to work on the farm in order to acquire the new techniques and practices. They have also started small experiments of their own to boost output from their farms. Learner participation is an organic part of the learning process since the learner has an active role in each of the activities.

When the Oraons first came to the Shahdol area, they were regarded as expert earth-movers. They could literally move mountains of earth to develop agricultural land or to reshape territory for mining and industrial operations. They settled near Naura's village and the first batch came to clear Naura's land of vegetation and to make it arable. They stayed on to learn about vegetable cultivation, to decipher the alphabet in the evenings, to read the clock for work timings, to add and subtract their wages and bonuses, to tape their songs in the new fangled machine that the 'mad' Naura carried around with him. Through their self activity, they helped Naura to develop the course content, the games, and the pedagogy. In the meantime their families had carved out small farms for themselves out of barren land in the interior. While the elders carted off the stones, felled the trees, and ploughed the soil on their own little plots, the children learnt how to grow vegetables on Naura's land. After two years this batch of learners left to make their own farms productive. Using the technology they had picked up, they gradually increased their surplus. And with the confidence born out of this surplus as well as with their native militancy sharpened by what they had learnt and observed in the educational process, they helped their families to resist the pressures of landlords and police, rich farmers and

cattle owners, officials and bureaucrats - all determined to dispossess them of the land, once barren, and now a source of food.

All production and marketing activities are generally supervised by Naura himself. The "formal" learning periods are shared between him and Anuradha, depending upon the constraints of co-ordination involved. Many of the detailed tasks in the fields are guided by the more experienced learner.

The Learning Situation

The more experienced workers automatically assume the role of teaching and guiding the new entrants into the learning process. However, the task of transmitting the more formal elements of learning (the 3 R's) is not yet generally observable in the learning process. At the moment, the ability to transmit knowledge of tasks is the main criterion in determining who is to instruct whom.

The farm is situated in a village with a population of approximately 1300, located 9 kilometres away from a small town which is a rail junction. The village consists of a mixture of tribal families, Muslim traders and agriculturists and both Muslim and upper caste Hindu landlords, rich farmers and middle-level farmers. The village is connected by metalled road to the town and is served by a number of private buses. The infrastructure available at the village level comprises a primary school without a building, electricity for pumps and houses, panchayat facilities and a mini public health centre in a smaller adjoining village.

The farm operates in all three seasons, so does the educational activity. The duration of the course is indefinite, varying with the individual learner's interest and the ability of the activity to provoke and sustain that interest. A desirable duration would be two years.

The Learners

The number of learners is about 24 per year. Most stay for two years but a few leave within six months, depending on various social and economic pressures - particularly the need to cultivate their own precious plots of land during the rainy season. The girls at a very young age move to other villages after their wedding. The total number of children in the village where Naura lives, in the age group 10-16, is a little over 100. Hence, in the restricted area, the experiment reaches out to approximately 20 per cent of the child population eligible for education.

The learners are encouraged to ask questions and to discuss issues amongst themselves and with Naura and Anuradha. Often native skills are brought to bear on tasks and advice is sought on local practices. The day's activities are planned in the morning through discussion

and mutual distribution of tasks. The older students generally enjoy the privilege of choosing their own tasks. The formal teaching sessions are held outdoors and timings often adjusted to suit mutual convenience. The weekly holiday is on the bazaar day, in tune with local needs and custom.

Resource Development

The learner is first inducted into tasks related to agriculture. This is necessary for two reasons: (a) to gauge whether the interests of the individual are confined to wage earning alone or whether there is also a desire to learn; and (b) to familiarise the potential learner in the initial period with the environment and the people there. In the second stage, interested individuals are drawn into the 'formal' educational sessions. In the third stage, the individual gets involved in discussions which range across a wide variety of developmental and social problems which may range from nutrition to harassment of village girls by the boys from the same village and other local issues. In the fourth stage, there is participation in cultural activities such as singing and dancing; the learner now feels at ease in the environment. At the present, the boys have shown an interest in learning about aspects of appropriate technology while the girls are interested in learning household related activities; but neither has yet been systematised.

Curriculum Development

The habit of planning and systematic execution of agricultural activity is reinforced through the use of drawings, charts and daily discussions. Thus a survey map of the farm demarcating the various plots acts as an aid in deciding what work needs to be done on which plot. Similarly, pictures and photographs showing the use of equipment are also being collected.

Instruction in reading, writing and calculation normally takes place in the mid-day break from work. Classes are held in the open air and the learners are provided with slates and pencils to practice letters, words and numbers. The words that are initially taught are related to the environment. In the next step, using the letters in the word identified, both learners and instructors go through the exercise of contructing more words that make sense. This helps in familiarisation with the script.

Education games are played in the evening after the day's work. These games are designed to promote the conscious intellectual activity of the learner, by immediately relating thought to action. What follows is a description of a few of the games:

(a) All the participants stand in a circle and go through the motions of eating. One person standing in the middle of the circle calls out the names of various eatables; suddenly he will call out a word that does not relate to an eatable. Those who simulate the action of eating are then penalised for it.

(b) All the participants jog in a circle, with one person in the centre calling out "how many boys, how many?" - to which the response is "as many as you want". Suddenly the conductor will say "three"; the learners have to then assemble in clusters of three and those who cannot form a group are penalised.

(c) In the cultural sessions, the learners start singing local songs to the traditional music and beat. Then they are taught new songs with the same time and beat but with newer associations of ideas. There is an attempt to get them to start making their own new songs for a cultural troupe.

It is appreciated that the curriculum is being developed as the learning of the participants is progressing. If the pedagogic methods have to be applied for a wider clientele level, then books will have to be written for the purpose, systematising the various concepts being experimented with.

Learning Materials

The whole educational activity is being done with a minimum of materials which fall into four categories: (a) charts, drawings and pictures for agricultural activity; (b) a roll-up blackboard, a globe and maps for the classroom sessions; (c) a harmonium and a drum for the cultural sessions; and (d) a few special items such as a decile counter for teaching numbers and decimals. A major portion of the communication is verbal, drawing upon everyday observations and experience.

Except for the classroom sessions, the agricultural activity is partially decentralised and the cultural activity and educational games almost wholly decentralised.

Use of Media

Instruction and discussions are carried on in a mixture of Hindi and Baghelkhandi, the local dialect. The cultural sessions utilise the folk media, mainly musical. At a later stage, there are ideas of introducing the other folk arts of drawing, painting and clay modelling. As yet, the stage has not been reached where written material can be introduced. The classroom sessions make use of the few teaching aids such as the globe, maps and charts for the transmission of concepts.

Problems and Solutions

There have been difficulties in mastering the local idiom and recognising cultural patterns characteristic of the region. Accurate historical records are virtually non-existent. However, many of the difficulties of the experiment have to be viewed in the larger social setting of the experiment. These difficulties can be classified as:

(i) economic - due to the paucity of resources and time that have to be divided between production and educational activity;

(ii) cultural - arising from the non-acceptance of an "outsider", since historical experience tends to equate the outsider with the exploiter;

(iii) social - other farmers view the activity and the activist with suspicion since they feel that the labourers are receiving too many facilities; they also look down upon any overt interaction with women; many difficulties arise out of the under-development of the marketing infrastructure.

Solutions to the economic difficulties have been cash crops for greater income, loans from banks for financing the development of the farm, emergency loans from friends, decentralisation of marketing of produce, credit obtained on the local market. As yet, the economic difficulties have not been overcome.

The cultural solution has been a clear personal involvement in economic, social and other relationships. Opposition from other farmers has been partially overcome by Naura's participation in the farmers' developmental struggles through the formation of a Farmers Committee which takes up with the authorities issues of bank credits, electric supply, market space, etc.

Financing and Costs

There has been no direct funding by any agency for the project. The seed capital for the experiment has been created from personal funds, with some contributions from friends. The shortfall has been made up by accepting crop and irrigation loans from commercial banks at market rates of interest. The capital input from all three sources is about Rs.50,000 out of which 60 per cent has been from private funds and 40 per cent from banks. Of this Rs.50,000, Rs.20,000 has been spent on developing two wells, the first of which was unsuccessful and had to be written off as a total loss. A significant portion of the development costs have been ploughed back from production on the farm; however, the experiment has not yet proved economically viable due to a variety of reasons arising out of the underdevelopment of the region. With such a structure of funding, there is no question of agency intervention in influencing the course of the educational

experiment, except in so far as banks demand repayment and levy penalties thus upsetting agricultural schedules.

Since the learners pay for themselves, the cost per learner is virtually negligible. In formal education programmes not linked to production, the opportunity cost of wages lost would have to be added to actual costs of teaching (teacher cost, materials and so on); thus Rs.4.00 of wages lost + Rs.4.00 of actual costs per day would mean Rs.8.00 per learner per day. In addition, these farmers have been contributing financially to the funds of the Farmers Committee which, through its activity, provides further social material for educational work. So far, the observable effects on the community indicate that the community has participated in learning. There has been no community contribution in teaching. But middle and poor farmers have been practicing new agricultural techniques and their behaviour patterns with labour have been changing with labour's increasing militancy. Almost every conceivable effort has been made to slash costs and to stabilise the economic base of the experiment. This has been necessary in order to develop the infrastructure necessary for uninterrupted production and education. This has meant tremendous hardship for Naura and his family. Natural calamities like drought and developmental conditions like subsoil water scarcity have added to the burden of unavoidable costs.

Continuing Education and Replication

Naura envisages that the time has come to institutionalise his experiment in the form of a "Shram Niketan" (Labour Institute) for the purpose of continuing education. The educational activity will be directed towards the two major sub-groups amongst the peasantry:

(i) Peasant landholders who are interested in the development of agriculture in the region. The Shram Niketan will organise camps and training sessions dealing with intensive agricultural techniques, new crops, use of appropriate technologies in agriculture and so on. The trials of innovation techniques suitable to the region will be carried out on the farm before being introduced into the training sessions. In addition, the Shram Niketan will seek to develop as a forum in which a wide variety of developmental issues such as irrigation, land erosion and deforestation can be discussed. Financial help will be accepted from various government agencies operating at the local level who have schemes for the development education of farmers.

(ii) Marginal farmers and landless labourers will stay and work on the farm which will be adjacent to the Shram Niketan. Issues arising out of production, literacy and the use of cultural and social media will form the main content of the educational programme for these sections. This activity will

be self-supporting, except for initial aid necessary for building up the minimum infrastructure for housing the learners and the educational materials for the programme. It is this latter activity that will deal essentially with non-formal education for the age group 6-16 years. Due to the novelty of the approach in the experiment, the question of replication can at best be in the realms of conjecture.

In terms of what has so far been achieved lie the seeds of the future. Let us see what sense we can make out of them:

(i) A significant number of middle and rich farmers have to take to vegetable cultivation, realising the profitless economics of cereal cultivation. A small number of educated professionals and businessmen have shown an inclination towards purchasing land and developing it for agricultural use.

(ii) The first batch of labourers, all of them marginal farmers from the Oraon tribe, have also taken a wet crop of vegetables on newly acquired and developed land. They have marketed their surplus produce and seem quite satisfied with the cash returns. What has been most remarkable is the jump from a traditional cereal crop, Kodo, to the stage of cash crop cultivation.

(iii) Other tribal farmers (from Kol and Gond tribes) have sent their sons and daughters to work as labourers on the farm in order to acquire the new techniques.

(iv) The older tribal students have expressed an interest in forming a cultural troupe which will hold musical performances in the neighbouring villages. They are now in the process of acquiring mastery over their musical instruments and their voices.

(v) One tribal girl covered the equivalent of five years of formal education in a period of a year and a half. On her own initiative, she started teaching her younger siblings and the smaller village children in her home. However, this effect cannot yet be said to be a general phenomenon.

There are many unusual aspects of the experiment that may make replication of the experiment in another region difficult:

(i) The experience and commitment which arise in this case from a twenty year history of involvement in social work institutions;

(ii) Easy cultural acceptance by the non-tribal sections of the peasantry arises from the roots of a peasant background;

(iii) The financial hardships inherent in the experiment if it is to maintain its organic link with the experience of the peasantry in the region;

(iv) Uncertainties connected with the spread of the educational effect within a region; it is premature to comment about the spread effect at present.

If the work cannot be replicated, then those involved in the experiment would see no relevance in continuing it. The means to replicating it would appear to be by institutionalising it, but outside the formal educational system.

No one has been inspired to begin an educational programme of the same dimensions because of the tremendous energy required to run a farm as an educational-cum-commercial unit. But of those motivated by the general idea we can count:

(a) a group of engineers running a mechanical workshop along similar lines in Shahdol district;

(b) another engineer assisting a group of skilled workers to run a workshop-cum-polytechnic in Durg district; and

(c) a lawyer who plans to run his farm on similar lines in Chindwara district.

Hopefully others would also learn from the experiment once it generates adequate experience through the Shram Niketan and gets to be better known.

In Shahdol district the work at Naura's farm is related intrinsically to the larger project of Environmental Education being conducted there by a voluntary group. The focus of the project is to educationally link together the various issues in the total environment (social, economic, political), particularly to the poor. Thus, the work of agricultural development is linked to industrialisation which, in turn, is related to ecology, employment, health, conservation of resources and so on, and the political decisions required to channel development into beneficial avenues. The underlying basis is that education begins from the work-place. In this sense, the only possible linkages with the formal education system lie either with the TTI (Teachers Training Institute) where teachers are being trained or with the socially useful productive work schemes in the schools and colleges. These linkages are at the stage of discussion and have not been formally made yet. One of the germinating ideas is an environmental study of the Sone river basin to be conducted by college students, the data from which will be fed into the formal environment-based courses like history, politics and geography.

Evaluation and Monitoring

As yet the modest scale of the experiment has not required any sophisticated system for monitoring. However, Naura has been engaged in a continuous discussion both with the learners as well as other concerned individuals in the area on the content and nature of his experiment. This has been a regular part of the conceptual framework itself trying to relate education to daily experience. Thus, much of the evaluative discussion takes place either at the farm itself with visitors who may be farmers, government officials, or social workers, or at the market place with other vegetable sellers, school teachers, and consumers. Through this evaluative mechanism, Naura has come to the following conclusions:

(1) The labouring classes have adopted a defensive style of conversation in which their responses have no real meaning but are adapted to the oppressive situation in which they find themselves. This has become so ingrained that even amongst themselves their communication is restricted. The games, as part of the educational curriculum, help the worker learners to become more active and alert in their mental responses.

(2) The physical training, apart from loosening up muscles and building up stamina, also imparts discipline and a sense of confidence whose immediate impact can be seen in the farm work.

(3) This confidence is further reinforced by the fact that the workers go to work with copy books in their hands and are treated as equals by the coordinators, as mental and physical labour are given equal importance.

(4) The cultural programmes have drawn in other workers from the nearby villages and there is the beginning of a wider network of communication.

(5) The worker learners also interact with other real life situations outside the links of the farm, particularly in the market where they help to sell the vegetable produce. In the same market cloth, oil, salt, soap and so on are sold by merchants at exorbitant rates and these unequal rates of exchange become the subject of much discussion at the farm itself.

(6) With the gradual increase in the confidence and abilities of the learners, they have begun to participate in decision-making roles on the farm and gradually Naura is finding more and more of his earlier responsibilities being decentralised leading to the hope that at some stage the Shram Niketan would become a co-operative endeavour not dependent on the capacity of a single dedicated and devoted individual.

In any case, Naura is conscious that a proper evaluation of this programme of non-formal education will be inevitable and possible when the effort has been institutionalised as the Shram Niketan. However, he feels confident that his present experiment has yielded valuable and sufficient data on the content of a non-formal educational activity.

SARVODAYA PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN SERVICES PROGRAMME

A. T. Ariyaratne

Introduction

An Overview of The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement with Special Reference to Non-Formal Education Programmes.

The Philosophical Basis

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement ('Sarvodaya - awakening of all; 'Shramadana' - through the gift of time, thought and energy) is an indigenous effort of the people of Sri Lanka, particularly in the rural areas, to bring about self-development. It draws upon cultural and philosophical ideas familiar to the people of the country. The Movement is non-political in nature and devotes its entire efforts towards the development of man and society by non-violent methods of change.

According to this philosophy, the development of man as a member of a family, village or urban group is the foundation on which national development activities and world development efforts should be established. Therefore all the programmes and projects of the Movement have included spiritual, cultural, and social elements as a prerequisite to material development.

All Sarvodaya programmes originate from the grass roots level and extend upward with self-reliant and cooperative efforts on the part of the immediate beneficiaries. The Movement has thus succeeded in achieving a national character and is the largest non-governmental voluntary organisation in the country today, with a message to convey to the human being, Paurushodaya (personality awakening); to the village, Gramodaya (village awakening); to the nation, Deshodaya (national awakening) and to the world, Vishvodaya (world awakening).

Objectives and Methodology

The first ten years of the Movement (1958 - 1967) were devoted entirely to Shramadana (offering of labour) camps which were organised in all parts of the country, enabling hundreds of people including school children to participate in labour-intensive village reconstruction projects of direct benefit to the people. However, the major objectives of the organisers of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement during this period were to :

(a) awaken masses of rural people by concrete development action to exploit their own development potential through self-help and self-reliance;

(b) bring about a general recognition of the value of utilising labour resources, which the people were voluntarily prepared to give for the development of the nation;

(c) evolve in the country a grass roots leadership for development inspired by the people's traditional and cultural values and based on a knowledge of the science of village development gained through participatory experience; and

(d) pave the way for a theory and practice of development with an integrated approach towards the development of the human person and of his or her community, nation and the world. This may be termed a 'non-violent revolutionary movement for changing man and society'.

The second ten years of the Movement began with the 100 villages development scheme, which was later extended to a 1000 villages development scheme. During this phase of activities of the Movement, strategies for people's participation in self-development such as Shramadana camps, family gatherings, group formation at grass roots, international village to village link-up programmes, self-employment schemes and development education programmes were developed. These activities resulted in the development of an integrated approach to bring about changes in ideas and attitudes, in methods and techniques in village development and organising activities at the grass roots level.

Programmes of Work Carried Out

The Movement has in varying degrees developed programmes that embrace every aspect of human life, and over the years has grown into a national as well as international movement having elements of welfare as well as development programmes, including increased productivity and economic growth and a broad range of social services.

At the village level, peer groups are organised and programmes carried out pertaining to pre-school children, school-going children and youth, out of school youth, mothers, farmers, craftsmen, Buddhist monks, dignitaries of other religions, foreign students, and government officials. All these programmes have spiritual, moral, cultural, social, political and economic elements integrated into a total approach to the development of man's personality and his social situation.

A clear philosophical basis, intelligible both to the ordinary people in a village community and to the development planning elite at the national as well as international levels, has been established. It became possible to identify hundreds of village level leaders of outstanding ability. Harmonious relationships were established with local and central government authorities and political leaders (several preliminary prejudices notwithstanding), and thus it was possible to make the Movement an organised, effective, people's development agency in the country, working towards supplementing the efforts of the government for national development. With time, the Movement was able to receive government recognition and co-operation, enabling it to obtain such assistance as tax exemptions,

grants and approvals for development in co-operation with other similar government and non-governmental organisations including those in other countries. There are nearly 4,000 villages in which programmes at various stages of progress are underway.

Admittedly many mistakes were made and the lessons learnt have been used for future programming. A major lesson learnt was the importance of non-economic factors in the carrying out of economic development programmes. Experience has clearly shown that mere economic development efforts do not create indigenous development. The Movement therefore emphasises the creation of a psycho-social infrastructure, before or during the implementation of economic activities.

Development of the Movement

The major inputs for the development of this Movement came from the people of the country, who gave their time, thought and energy which if computed would total millions of man-hours. Substantial financial and material assistance was also received from the villagers to conduct Shramadana camps and infrastructural construction and activities in villages. From 1969 onwards, financial and material assistance was also received from 16 agencies outside the country.

The legal position of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is derived from the Act of Incorporation of the Movement by Parliament in 1972 under the name Lanka Jatika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya.

The Movement is formed by the members of the Incorporated Sangamaya who are organised in Sarvodaya group formations (haulas), as children (7-15), youth (15 and above), mothers, farmers and general elders. Besides, there are members of various Sarvodaya societies; Sarvodaya Bhikku Conference, Sarvodaya Shramadana Societies, Sarvodaya Branch Societies, Sarvodaya Gramodaya Councils, Sarvodaya Deshodaya Council, Sarvodaya Shramadana International and Sarvodaya organisations in other countries.

The Sarvodaya Executive Council of 57 members is elected at the Annual General Meeting of the Sangamaya. The Annual General Meeting also selects the office-bearers and the Elders' Council who form part of the Executive Council.

The conceptual framework as well as practical programmes in pursuance of the concepts have been developed by the Movement. The objectives of the programme that are currently in operation can be summarised as: psychological infrastructure building, physical infrastructure building, basic human needs satisfaction programme, social infrastructure building, training in functional leadership, training in appropriate technologies, building participatory structures, organisation for economic justice, peaceful resolution of conflicts and strengthening Vishvodaya groups.

To realise the objectives enumerated above, the services carried out by the Movement are : (1) pre-school children's services, (2) school-going children's services, (3) pre-employment voluntary services for youth, (4) Shramadana camps, (5) rural technical services, (6) youth in agriculture and village industries services, (7) rural credit and savings services, (8) development education services, (9) rural housing programmes, (10) Sarvodaya Research Institute, (11) Shanthi Sena (Peace Army), (12) National integration programmes, (13) plantation workers development services, (14) model village and self-help and housing programmes, (15) library and recreation services, (16) community shops services, and (17) international development co-operation.

Two case studies - the Pre-school Children's Services and Shanti Sena (Peace Army) illustrate the involvement of the Movement in reaching services to the community through the pre-school child and the school age youth. (The latter case study is presented in the next section - see pp. 125-30.)

THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES PROGRAMME

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka initiated the Sarvodaya Children's Services Programme in 1972 recognising the necessity for an integrated approach to satisfy the health, nutrition and child-care needs of the rural population. In the past ten years, this programme has evolved and expanded into a comprehensive network of services touching the lives of over 100,000 pre-school children, 150,000 children between the ages of 6-14 and approximately 60,000 mothers all over the country. These pre-school centres are located in well over 4000 rural villages and cater for the education and social needs of children and mothers, specially from socially and economically deprived communities.

The general objectives are :

(a) Development of a healthy and intelligent community of children with special attention to nutrition, health-care and psycho-social development.

(b) Propagation of self-help and self-reliance amongst them as well as of the rest of the community.

(c) Formation of a psychological and organisational infra-structure for growth and development.

To achieve the above, the Children's Services Programme has undertaken the provision of: (a) adequate nutrition for the pre-school child and the family; (b) preventive and curative health-care services for the pre-school child and the family; (c) pre-school education for children between 3 to 5 years of age; (d) nutrition, health-care and education programmes for pregnant and lactating mothers; (e) library services for the community; (f) health, nutrition, education, cultural and spiritual programmes for school-going children; (g) income-generating activities for members of mothers' groups, children's groups and pre-school teachers;

and (h) for the introduction of the Sarvodaya ideals of a righteous society based on respect for all life or Loving-Kindness (Metta), Compassionate Action (Karuna), Altruistic Joy (Muditha) and Equanimity (Upekka) in the community.

The Children's Services Programme, initiated in the year 1972, at the outset was conceived as a feeding programme for children. It was noticed that a large majority of children of the low-income groups in the rural and urban sector were ill-fed and undernourished. So a programme to provide a balanced meal for these children was given priority as a felt need. Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement at this stage mobilised and organised mothers of the respective groups of children to help meet the challenge. Groups of children, specially of the pre-school age, gathered in the mornings at a selected place in the village where the Sarvodaya workers with the assistance and co-operation of the mothers, and with local resources, fed the children. The meeting place was sometimes a hut in the village, a temple or any shady place. This feeding programme was organised in a very simple and modest manner and became very popular among the children and mothers. Mothers gathered round, children remained longer hours and the Sarvodaya workers were encouraged to move toward adding on other programmes in health, education, culture and so on, to the existing feeding programme. Mothers on their part organised themselves and gave their support. Specific sites were determined, physical structures were put up with local support and resources. Pre-school sevakas (workers) for each centre were selected from the village by the mothers themselves. The idea spread from village to village and the network of pre-school centres set up has today a total of well over 4000.

Activities

Nutrition Programme

(a) Community Kitchen : The community kitchen is housed in the Children's Services Centre in the village. All activities in connection with the community kitchen are planned and implemented with the guidance and assistance of the mothers' group. The members of the children's group participate by collecting firewood and conducting shramadana to maintain the community kitchen. Pre-school children also contribute by bringing a match-box full of rice each day to school. The rice is emptied into a pot each morning, and is used to prepare the mid-day meal. The services provided through a community kitchen are : (i) Nutrition for pre-school children. A nutritious meal prepared with greens and rice (kola kanda) is served daily at 8.00 a.m. in the pre-school. Again, at 10.00 a.m. a fruit drink, milk or triposha is served. Where resources are available a mid-day meal consisting of rice, breadfruit, potatoes, collected from the mothers, is also served. (ii) Members of the children's group, pregnant and lactating mothers, patients, the aged and the disabled are also provided with kola kanda and milk regularly. Vegetables and fruits that are used in the community kitchen are donated by the village community and are also grown in the home garden maintained by the Children's Services Centre.

(b) Home Gardening Programme : In fighting malnutrition, the Sarvodaya's experience has shown that the long-term solution for this problem to a great extent lies in maintenance of successful home gardens. Home gardening by the members of the children's and mothers' groups has not only met daily nutritional requirements of households, but also paved the way for the villagers to make an additional income by sale of the surplus vegetables and fruit. Even in the short-run, the villagers get an additional income by saving the amount they usually pay to the shop-keeper. The necessary plants and seeds are distributed from the Sarvodaya nurseries and the seed bank maintained in the Children's Services Centre. Arrangements have been made to provide technical assistance from the Government Agricultural Extension Services. Home garden competitions are organised in order to encourage the participants and marketing facilities made available by organising week-end fairs in the village.

The usefulness of maintaining compost pits is also stressed for this programme. Instructions on maintaining compost pits, and how they contribute to the home garden is provided by Sarvodaya workers.

(c) Nutrition Education : Education on food values, balanced diet, preservation of food, prevention of wastage, home economies, storing of grains and seedlings is provided to the mothers in the village.

(d) Health-care Services : (i) Personal hygiene - children in the pre-schools and day-care centres are taught to follow good health habits e.g. washing hands before meals, keeping their hair and nails clean. (ii) Environmental sanitation - campaigns are organised through shramadana to make people aware of the importance of a clean and beautiful environment, construction of latrines for the villagers (with the assistance from the Health Department), building systems for the disposal of garbage and unclean water, and by conducting health campaigns. (iii) Immunisation - children are immunised against polio, diptheria, whooping cough and T.B. (iv) Health clinics - monthly health clinics are organised in the villages for monitoring the growth and development of the children and pregnant mothers. Government health officials are brought to the village for these activities. (v) Health education - is provided through campaigns, film shows, exhibitions and staging dramas which show how diseases are spread and what preventive measures should be taken. Health Department Officials are invited to talk to the mothers and the community on health and nutrition. (vi) First aid - treatment for minor ailments and first-aid is provided for the village community.

Pre-school Education Services

To bring about the physical, social, psychological, spiritual, and cultural development of the child between the ages of 3 to 5, the activities conducted under the pre-school education programme include the concept of numbers, recognition of shapes and colours, language arts (puppetry, dramatic play), environmental studies, creative art, free play, religious and cultural activities.

Maternal Welfare Services

Educational programmes emphasising proper diet and behaviour, (or for instance, seeing the doctor regularly), as well as child care are provided for pregnant mothers. Clinical services are also organised for regular check-ups for pregnant mothers.

Library Services

In order to increase the literacy rate amongst the village population, a village library has been established in every Children's Service Centre. Members of the children's group and youth group are encouraged to use the library services.

Income-generating Services

(a) Community Shop Programme : Former pre-school teachers are selected and trained to run community shops. The objectives of the community shop programme are: to save the poor villager from the grip of middlemen and the credit burden, to give him a fair price for his produce, and to make all consumer goods available in the village.

Maintaining the shop is the responsibility of the trained teacher. This includes purchase and sale and book-keeping of goods. These activities are conducted with the capital loan provided by the head-quarters of the Movement and closely supervised and monitored by the special committee of the mothers' group.

(b) Credit and Savings Scheme : This scheme resulted from the success of the home gardens and cottage industries projects in the villages. The money earned by selling the surplus from home garden is deposited in the name of each child in the National Savings Bank. With the increase of the amount of savings in one particular district (Kegalle), Sarvodaya's own village level banking system was introduced to the villages.

(c) Cottage Industries : Industries such as dress-making, mat and basket-weaving are encouraged in the villages. Mothers are provided with the capital to buy raw materials and tools and equipment. The product is sold in the village itself in most cases. In the case of a surplus, the goods can be sold through the Sarvodaya Community Shops network.

Organisational Structure

The Children's Services Unit comes under the Sarvodaya Development Education Institute based in Moratuwa (see chart*). All activities conducted by the Children's Services Unit are monitored and co-ordinated by the Children's Services Committee consisting of 8 full-time Sarvodaya workers. In an effort to decentralise the services, this unit has trained approximately 27 district level children's services co-ordinators (trainers), 144 children's services supervisors, 182 community health workers and 3370 pre-school teachers.

* p. 124

For organisational and operational purposes, the entire project is structured at four levels namely national, district, gramodaya (village council) and village. The Children's Services Unit at the national level is headed by a Children's Services Committee consisting of eight members and staffed by a National Children's Services Co-ordinator and resource personnel. Their primary work is to monitor and co-ordinate all activities conducted by the Children's Service Centres at village level. Other activities are : training pre-school teachers, community health workers, children's services supervisors and children's services co-ordinators, conducting seminars and workshops for mothers' groups, children's groups, and pre-school teachers on nutrition, health care, child care, maternal welfare, production of play toys and materials and income-generating activities, and co-ordination of Sarvodaya's island-wide children's services activities.

The 27 children's services co-ordinators function at the 27 Sarvodaya administrative districts assisted by resource personnel. The main activities at the district level are : training of pre-school teachers (short-term) and community health workers (short-term); conducting seminars and workshops for mothers' groups, children's groups and pre-school teachers; and supervising community health workers and children's services supervisors.

At the gramodaya (village council) level are the children's services supervisors numbering 144 and community health workers numbering 182. The 144 supervisors look after the children's services activities at village level and conduct seminars and workshops. The community health workers conduct health-care and nutrition programmes at the village level. They also assist in the linkage of government health services with the village.

The 2500 Children's Services Centres at the village level are handled by the 3370 pre-school teachers whose primary activities are the provision of health care, nutrition and pre-school education to children below 5, health and nutrition education to the village community, library services to the village, and community development activities.

The Sarvodaya Pre-school Services organised and structured in this manner work in close collaboration with the existing development programmes of the state. Although the Sarvodaya programmes are generally of a non-formal nature, attempts are always made to link these services with existing formal development programmes at the village level. The Sarvodaya extension workers have always come forward to seek the assistance and co-operation of the government extension workers and link-up state services with those of Sarvodaya.

The state medical personnel and health extension workers visit the Sarvodaya Children's Services Centres and extend their services in such fields as health-care, immunisation and health education. In the field of maternal welfare and nutrition, family welfare officers of the state and the agricultural extension workers of the department of agriculture render very valuable services at these Children's Services Centres, by

being present and rendering all assistance possible in the form of lectures, talks, demonstrations and film shows. Adult education officers, school inspectors and teachers of the Education Department play an important role in assisting the Sarvodaya workers in non-formal education programmes organised for the child and the mother.

Banking and credit facilities of the state available at village level are utilised fully through the state officials. The income-generating activities conducted by Children's Services Centres at village level are closely linked with other similar state services. The services of state officials specially in the field of technology and marketing have become very useful in promoting cottage industries among the members of the mothers' group. Apart from the assistance and co-operation received from the state sector by linking these programmes with those of Government, the governmental sector too plays a vital role. Nutrition, library services and education programmes are largely linked with their development programmes. Agencies such as CARE, IYC, UNICEF have linked their programmes with those of Sarvodaya Children's Services and assistance in the form of materials, instruction and guidance is always forthcoming.

Arrangements for the Learning Situation

The pre-school teachers functioning at village level are generally identified and selected by the mothers' group. Originally their primary role was to act as a caretaker of children and assisting in the feeding programme. Though much emphasis is generally not laid on academic qualifications, most of the selected teachers have completed secondary education. The primary concern in the selection is the personality factor. The love and affection for children, willingness and dedication for work, ability to mobilise and organise the village community for development and community leadership are some of the major considerations. Pre-school teachers thus selected by the mothers' group receive periodical training of an organised nature at the headquarters based at Moratuwa. These training programmes provide opportunities for the trainees to obtain practical and theoretical knowledge and experience in such fields as child psychology, nutrition, health-care and primary education. As numbers grew and the system expanded, there was a need for a systematic supervision of the activities of the pre-school teachers. This task was entrusted to a Pre-school Supervisor functioning at gramodaya (village council) level, who was generally selected from among the pre-school teachers and to the co-ordinator of all children's services at the district level. The supervisor and co-ordinator were thus people with wide experience in the field of children's services and other related subjects. They too received periodic training at the headquarters. Government extension workers such as the Health and Agricultural Officers, staff from the Sri Lanka University and the Women's Bureau were used as resource personnel. Their services were obtained for the training sessions and, at informal field level, for activities conducted both centrally and in villages.

The training courses provided are of four types for:

(a) Pre-School Teachers - A two week (short-term) residential training programme is conducted at district and divisional level and a 3 months (long-term) residential training programme at the children's services unit at headquarters.

(b) Community Health Workers - This is a 3 months training programme basically meant for the village level staff and is centrally conducted at the headquarters.

(c) Children's Services Supervisors' - This training programme is specifically designed for the supervisors and is of a months' duration centrally conducted at the headquarters.

(d) Children's Services Co-ordinators - Co-ordinators at district level receive this training at the headquarters periodically.

All the courses are conducted with the full participation of the trainees. The course content is delivered through the lecture method followed by discussions. Much emphasis is generally laid on problem-solving in a participatory manner. Opportunities and guidance for practical experience are generally provided in a non-formal setting and emphasis is placed on field experience.

Resource Development

The primary objective of the training and orientation programmes is to provide the individual with practical knowledge and experience in relation to nutrition, health care, child care and maternal welfare activities. With the rapid decentralisation of the activities of the Movement, the required resource personnel are drawn from the district itself.

A primary concern is to obtain curriculum material based on the needs of the child and the trainee. One curriculum has been centrally developed with bottom up participation and is being used island-wide for all training and orientation programmes. However, flexibility being the key word, alteration of content and methodology to suit the target group and the conditions pertaining to districts and zones is given high priority.

Shortage of curriculum materials such as charts, pamphlets, books and handouts remains a major problem, specially in regard to its relevance to local and individual needs. Orientation and training programmes provide considerable time for the trainees to produce education materials during the course. Much stress is laid on local resources and traditional media. Materials thus produced as samples are centrally turned out on a larger scale and distributed among all pre-school teachers functioning at village level.

Use of Media

A noteworthy feature is the harmonious combination of traditional and folk methods with modern and scientific media. Though great emphasis is laid on traditional methodology and much use is made of puppetry, songs, dances, drama and folk stories, scientific media pertaining to the educational and psychological aspects of the child development also remain a major component. Films, slides, tape recorders and modern scientific methodology are always linked harmoniously with traditional media to bring about greater impact. One major constraint in the use of modern scientific technology is the absence of material in the local national language. Most of the film strips and literature available are in English. Most of the resource personnel and the extension workers at field level are not conversant with English and hence there is a considerable drawback in the utilisation of modern media. However, attempts are made to translate the available materials into the local language. This process though vital is a slow one and does not keep pace with the changing times.

Financing and Costs

As regards the financing and cost of Children's Services Programmes, self-reliance is important. The identification of needs of children and the programming of services are based on the modalities accepted by the community organisation which controls activities. Based on the Sarvodaya philosophy for the promotion of self-reliance among rural people, the mothers of the target groups have accepted the responsibility of bearing the main burden of maintaining the children's services activities. The mothers' groups are responsible for the physical infrastructure development, maintenance of feeding programmes and the payment of living allowances to pre-school teachers and extension workers. Much of the financing of orientation and training programmes is borne by the Fredrick Neumann Stiftung (F.N.S.) of the Federal Republic of Germany. The district centres too provide either funds or materials to meet the additional costs. The donor agency is involved only in respect of funding and evaluation. It is primarily a support service leaving the Sarvodaya Children's Services free to act on the basis of their philosophy and methodology. As an accepted principle in Sarvodaya, community development would depend primarily on community participation, and children's services remain basically in the hands of the community.

Evaluation and Monitoring

All Sarvodaya Children's Services activities are evaluated and the feedback sent to the Children's Services Unit at the headquarters. Village level education of the progress of the services is done by the mothers' group. Supervisors and co-ordinators evaluate at field level. The evaluation of the work of the staff at pre-schools is done by the instructors and supervisors at the district level and their work is in turn evaluated by the central unit at the headquarters. In addition to this process of evaluation, the Sarvodaya Research Unit undertakes periodic evaluation of activities conducted by the Children's Services Unit.

Reports of such evaluations are carefully examined along with field staff and action is suitably initiated either as a remedial measure or as a strengthening process.

There is an organised reporting and evaluation process within the children's services network. Reports of all activities are maintained at pre-school level and transmitted upwards to the gramodaya (village council) level, district level and finally to the headquarters. This information is collected on a quarterly basis, studied and analysed, published and distributed for information. This is followed by an annual report prepared in the same manner. The evaluation process operates on similar lines. The cost-effectiveness is studied for the purposes of rectification and future guidance in continuing the programme.

Continuing Education and Replication

The children's services of the Sarvodaya Movement are basically meant for the pre-school child. Apart from the variety of aims of the programme, one main factor for consideration is the harmonious transition of the pre-school child to the formal school system.

The skills, aptitudes, attitudes and physical health of the pre-school child promoted by the children's services stand in good stead for the rest of his life and facilitate continuing education in the formal system. The Sarvodaya services do not stop with the pre-school level. The community has been organised into structural categories like the children's group, youth group, mothers' group and farmers' group; each with its range of activities and development programmes. These constitute a continuing process of education and replication which cater for the future needs of the child through whom Sarvodaya aspires to form a new society.

SARVODAYA CHILDREN'S SERVICES OPERATIONAL CHART

/CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE/

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NATIONAL LEVEL : Staff - National Children's Services Co-ordinator
- Resource Personnel

Activities:
1. Training of :
   - (i) Pre-school teachers) Sarvodaya
   - (ii) Community health workers) Development
   - (iii) Children's services supervisors) Education
   - (iv) Children's services coordinators) Institute
2. Conducting seminars and workshops for mothers' groups, children's groups and pre-school teachers on nutrition, health-care, child-care, material welfare, production of play materials and income-generating activities.
3. Island-wide co-ordination of Sarvodaya Children's Services activities.

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DISTRICT LEVEL : Staff - Children's Services Coordinators (Total No.27)
- Resource Personnel

Activities:
1. Training of :
   - (i) Pre-school teachers (short-term)
   - (ii) Community health workers (short-term)
2. Conducting seminars and workshops for mothers' groups, children's groups and pre-school teachers.
3. Supervision of community health workers and children's services supervisors.

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GRAMODAYA LEVEL :

Staff - Children's Services Supervisors (Total No.144)

Activities:
1. Supervision of children's services activities at village level.
2. Conducting seminars and workshops

Staff - Community Health Workers (Total No.182)

Activities:
1. Conducting health care and nutrition programmes at village level.
2. Linking of government health services with the village

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VILLAGE LEVEL: CHILDREN'S SERVICES CENTRES (Total No.500)

Staff: Pre-school Teachers (Total No. 3370)

Activities:
1. Providing health care, nutrition and pre-school education to children below age 5.
2. Health and nutrition education to village community.
3. Library services to village.
4. Organising community development activities (Shramadanas).

THE SARVODAYA SHANTI SENA (PEACE ARMY)

A.T. Ariyaratne

Introduction

Formal school education is based on the assumption that children have to play a future role in society as useful citizens. Currently the children are to a large extent passive recipients of knowledge and obliged to acquire skills which are very often not relevant in the context of personal or social development. However, they should not be mere consumers of the social product but be conscious participants and accelerators of the process of change. To ensure this we have to develop alternative structures and strategies involving the entire community and the resources available within it. What children learn in school should bring about behavioural changes applied to real life situations, for example:

(a) Health lessons should result in changes in health habits of the people in each home.

(b) Agriculture lessons should be the basis of home gardening either individually or collectively bringing an additional income to the family.

(c) Religion should have a practical expression in that children engage in social welfare activities in the school and its neighbourhood.

(d) Concepts and skills realised through physical sciences should lead to the enrichment of their day to day life and the production of goods either as a hobby or for profit.

(e) Children should play an active role in the protection of the environment.

Activities in school should be immediately purposeful. This brings up the question of resources. Resources within the school both human and material are limited both quantitatively and qualitatively. Hence we have to use community resources in conjunction with other government departments, voluntary organisations, the private business sector and knowledgeable and skilled individuals.

Learning involves the three major domains of cognition, psycho-motor skills and affective (emotive) development. Under the existing system of education they are made mutually exclusive and disconnected. They could be made to occur simultaneously if a strategy as detailed above is adopted. Doing, knowing and feeling occur simultaneously if children are involved in activities planned for the purpose. As regards

teaching itself, one could identify two primary methods: the banking system, and the problem-solving method. In the former, the children are passive recipients of knowledge. In the latter, they acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes simultaneously through a series of goal-directed activities which lead to a sense of personal fulfilment and self-realisation. Relevant activities could be developed on the basis of infra-personal development, in relation to the child as a member of the family, the school neighbourhood, the national community, and the international community. In each of these activities, the subject should be designed to fit the level of the physical and mental development of the child and should inculcate correct and relevant attitudes.

Although it is assumed that the free education system will ultimately reach out to every young learner and bring about equitable access to education, national surveys in Sri Lanka have repeatedly shown that many children do not enter the school system or even if they do, drop out early. Even the learning gained by being in school does not seem to throw much light on the future. So much so that even a successful learner often isolates himself from real life situations and the longer he stays in the system, the less able he is to relate to his environment.

The Shanti Sena (Peace Army) Programme of Sarvodaya is an attempt to give form and direction to the development oriented system of education, embracing all young people of school age who are currently in school or out of school. They act as catalysts directing their services and activities to all other age groups within the community.

The Sarvodaya Movement is striving to build a new person and through him a new village and a new world based on the Sarvodaya philosophy and its activities. As envisaged by the Leader of the Sarvodaya Movement, the ultimate aim is to provide every one with at least the "ten basic human needs" - environment, water, clothing, food, housing, health care, communication, fuel, education, spiritual and cultural needs. The Shanti Sena training and its action programme attempt to fulfil the building up of a new person. In this process the community is involved both as participants and beneficiaries.

Methodology

It is expected that through a sustained programme of training in Shanti Sena, it would be possible to widen the outlook of the Shanti Sena members, and to endow them with qualities of leadership, so as to enable them to create better villages and towns, and turn out bands of dependable workers who will persevere in their effort for the betterment of the rural and urban areas. The integration of Shanti Sena training techniques and service methods to already existing Shramadana and other techniques and methods of the Sarvodaya Movement, will undoubtedly and radically alter the old ways of thinking, to suit the new spirit and will serve as the creators of a new Sri Lanka. The following methodology is used.

Character Building

Training consists in enabling Shanti Sena Units to develop character and a keen sense of responsibility by the servce they render to the people through the activities of their units. The units take responsibility for the building and maintenance of a clean and beautiful physical, social, emotional and mental environment. Special emphasis is given to the construction of soak-pits, manure pits, maintenance of roads and wells, assistance during national calamities like fires, cyclones and floods, organisation of religious feasts, festivals and cultural activities, and motivating people to understand and appreciate the real significance of their culture and religion.

Physical Development

This is done by the units meeting regularly, at least once a week, and working on a planned programme which includes games, shramadana, swimming and rescue training, camping, home gardening, nature expedition, soil conservation, tree planting and vigilance work.

Economic Improvement

Village units utilise adult education methods, to teach improved home-gardening, bee-keeping, collection of vegetable seeds for the seed bank programme, herbal nurseries and handicrafts.

Preventive Health

For the protection of health the Shanti Sena members are given an elementary knowledge of the common diseases and their prevention and cure, particularly through indigenous medicines prepared from locally obtained herbs. Nursing the sick, elementary first-aid in the event of snake-bites, and maintenance of village sanitation are part of the course.

Spiritual and Cultural

Shanti Sena Units organise regular meditational occasions and religious activities such as Sil Campaigns (Buddhist vows renewed on full moon days), "Bodhi Poojas", sermons and feasts. It is one of the important endeavours of the Shanti Sena units to revive folk dances and folk songs and encourage community singing and participation in drama performances.

Socio-civic Work

This is a very sensitive field of activity due to party politics. However, every effort is made to impart knowledge of the nature and functions of the Local Bodies, District Councils and Gramodaya bodies. A concerted effort is made through training camps, village link-up schemes and other activities to maintain the national unity of the people of Sri Lanka.

Organisation of the Programme

The initiative comes from the Youth Group or Shramadana Samithiya. All those who are 15 and above and who desire to derive the benefits of the Shanti Sena, band themselves as a Group which is divided into smaller units of not more than eleven for purposes of activity and training. Membership is open to both boys and girls.

At the initial training, a membership card is given. The initial training includes subjects such as principles, aims and methods of the Sarvodaya Movement, forms of meditation, environment conservation, etc.

The initiation ceremony is the next step in the organisational set-up. The member is expected to take a pledge of service and then the Membership badge is presented. This is followed up with proficiency training and it continues as an ongoing programme.

To ensure collective training and self-management, the leaders of units form themselves into a Leader's Council. To this council of leaders are co-opted personnel such as the Chairman of the Shramadana Samithi, Sarvodaya Village Organiser, the Religious Leaders of the village (the Buddhist Monk, Christian Priest) who function as advisers. The Leaders' Council is responsible for the planning and execution of work programme, training and service activities, and the discipline and finances of the group.

The Programme in Operation

All activities of the Shanti Sena are programmed and directed in a non-formal manner with a view to providing an educational alternative to the entire community and aim at mobilising the community for active participation at field level. The existing Sarvodaya organisational structure comprising the children's group, youth group, mothers' group, farmers' group and the general elders' group, forms the base through which activities are planned and implemented enlisting the co-operation and participation of all members of the community. The interaction thus created enables the community to learn from relevant experiences. Acting on the primary principle of "learn by doing", the Shanti Sena Youth Volunteers monitor goal-directed activities basically for the moral, spiritual, cultural and social development of the community. Participation in such programmes enables the participants to acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for social well-being. It also provides them with the opportunity to play the role of an agent of change at the grass roots level.

Some of the service projects currently launched are briefly discussed below.

(a) First-Aid and Health-Care (Waidyadana Centre) in the village, is organised and operated by the members themselves. The first aid centre functions almost on a daily basis while the health programme is more comprehensive with periodical eye camps organised with the assistance of the Medical Officers and other experts.

(b) In the Health Programme, groups of two or three members share the responsibility for looking after 10 to 20 households. They assist each house-holder at an agreed time of the day to deal with his problem, to look after the sick and to render first aid.

The members help in keeping things inside and outside the house in an orderly manner and assist in maintaining the plants, nurseries, home-gardens, herbarium and compost pits. Cleanliness and neatness are emphasised.

(c) Hospital Service is looked upon as a most humane service. Patients in hospitals in the country are provided by the Shanti Sena with an organised service to meet their spiritual needs, and with measures to relieve them of mental pain and perhaps boredom.

(d) The National Amity Programme of the Shanti Sena is a special programme, designed to bring about unity among the Tamils in the North and the Sinhala people living on the rest of the island.

The Shanti Sena groups come into action in time of distress and during national disasters. Also, assistance is given at religious services and cultural activities.

The Unit Leaders are trained in techniques of leadership including group dynamics and conflict-resolving techniques, and in methods of organising and conducting proficiency service schemes for their members.

The Training Programme for Instructors in first aid, ayurveda home remedies, snake-bite, and in health and environmental conservation which is intensive and residential is conducted on a central as well as district basis, and normally lasts for one or two weeks. Practical training is given in the General Hospitals in the island and other Health Institutes. The training concludes with a special aptitude test for both theoretical and practical work.

For Shanti Sena members, training takes place in their own meeting grounds. Once a week the Instructors visit the village or the urban centre for conducting training. A booklet giving the syllabi for various subjects is made available to all the participants together with a training handbook.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Shanti Sena Unit District Co-ordinators meet at the beginning of the year to draw up a target programme for their respective districts which is then made known to the units of the districts through the Unit Leaders' Councils.

The Shanti Sena Unit Leaders' Councils in the villages meet once a week for preparing programmes, discussing the methods for implementing the programme and evaluating the activities of the week. The Unit Leaders' Councils submit their reports at the end of the month to the Shanti Sena

District Co-ordinator with a copy to the National headquarters. On receipt of reports, an evaluation is made and wherever necessary visits are made to the units for guidance and assistance. These help to remedy any shortcomings in methodology and training.

Responsibilities of the Centre and Field Units

The Centre is responsible for assisting the Field Units mainly with the necessary expertise for training members. It may be necessary to contact experts and arrange for lecturers. In remote areas, where facilities are not available to obtain experts, special training courses have to be organised for which purpose it may be necessary to arrange transport and other facilities for the instructors. Another responsibility of the Centre is to provide the equipment necessary for training.

When such services as the Hospital Service, Waidyadana Service, Conservation Service, and Preventive Health Service have to be rendered it may be necessary to support the Units initially with materials, equipment and organisational assistance.

In the event of national disasters such as cyclones and floods, it will be necessary for the Shanti Sena Units to render help with rescue and rehabilitation services. The organisational responsibility may have to be taken by the Centre in providing transport and other facilities, and perhaps for co-ordination of the Rehabilitation Programme.

Conclusion

Non-formal alternatives in education as carried out by the Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka have developed a harmonious linkage between all age groups, and between organisations in the state and the private sector. The multiple range of activities carried out are designed and monitored, primarily by mobilising each age group for co-ordinated development within the community. Inculcation of a correct attitude, impartation of knowledge and of development skills form the basic core of such programmes. The children's groups, youth groups, mothers' groups, farmers' groups and elders' groups though identified separately, merge together in the course of collective action for specific purposes. The services rendered flow from one group to the other in smooth collaboration, maintaining the social balance that is so vital for community development. The Sarvodaya Movement has from its very inception taken a non-political stand in its relations with the State while maintaining a strong and healthy co-ordination of all activities within. However, Sarvodaya continues to give every assistance to the efforts made by the State to alleviate the conditions under which the people, particularly the rural people live, provided that the measures taken by the State are consonant with the objects, ideals and methodology of the Movement. A major component of assistance is generally in the form of non-formal education programmes to create awareness and to inculcate correct and relevant attitudes in the minds of State extension workers and the members of the community.

NIGHT SCHOOLS OF THE SOCIAL WORK AND RESEARCH CENTRE

Aruna Roy

The Environment

Rajasthan is a semi-arid state where the average rainfall is low. In most parts of Rajasthan, the farmers till a hostile soil getting low yields. Thirty-five years after independence, it still has links with the feudal system that determined its lifestyle for centuries. Yet many old values are gradually giving way in the face of curiosity and the people are beginning to come to grips with change. The different demands of a democratic pattern of government and the introduction of local self government are only partly understood. Education is traditionally linked either with priesthood or with employment. The community has to work with officials at the grass root level and the grass root functionary controls access to many facilities - amongst them important functions such as certification necessary for the procurement of loans. Having a relation, preferably a son, in the official hierarchy facilitates access. Boys are sent to school with the expectation of employment. Girls are not sent to school as their education is seen as unnecessary.

When India became independent, primary education in the state of Rajasthan was limited to a few villages. Feudal norms determined access to education and this was limited to those who belonged to the upper strata of society. The Government of Rajasthan made primary education the responsibility of the Panchayat Samithi (local self-government committee) and a number of village schools were opened from 1952 onwards.

The village schools in independent India adopted the curriculum, the textbooks and the approach of urban primary schools which in turn had direct links with the education pattern and conventions established by the British when they ruled India. Though located so as to be easily accessible, the schools drew only a small percentage of the children in the age group 6-11. Formal education was seen as a relevant process for preparing children for responsible citizenship and for bringing them into the mainstream of participatory democracy. The teaching institutions however remained isolated from the village, its culture, activities and people.

In Rajasthan, the Education and Panchayat Departments which are responsible for the curricula and the running of the primary schools have not made any substantial changes and the number of alternative schools in the villages is small. The formal education pattern which was inherited from the British has been marginally modified and there are some efforts being made to change curricula.

The Government of India has laid down policy directives for the universalisation of primary education. The government has realised that all available alternatives to schooling have to be pursued if the problems of illiteracy and lack of education are to be tackled within the resources available. One of the more important recent efforts in this context is the institution of non-formal education programmes for children. The adult education programmes had always drawn a large number of children who for various reasons could not attend regular school in villages. This led the Government of India to encourage the exploration of alternatives to primary education and evening schools which perhaps may better satisfy the demands of the local people.

Silora

Silora is one of the eight development blocks in Ajmer district of the State of Rajasthan, a semi-arid area with rainfall very much below the national average. Irrigation is mainly through open wells. The people of this area are largely dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. Many small groups in the villages belonging to what is known as scheduled caste, also work on crafts and cottage industries. The Block has an area of 82,349 square kilometres with a population of approximately 110,000. In this semi-desert region agriculture is beset with numerous difficulties and even when the soil and water are comparatively better the yield per acre is below average. In the pre-independence era Silora was part of the kingdom of Kishengarh. The Raja of Kishengarh lived in the town which bears his name and which falls in the Block area of Silora. These 110 villages are grouped into 29 panchayats (village councils). Each one of these village councils elects a Sarpanch (village leader). There are 60 primary schools in the Block. Literacy according to the 1971 census is 20.73 per cent male and 3.53 per cent female.

Women do about 60 per cent of the agricultural work. Cultural restrictions on their activities appear inflexible. The women have to cover their heads and faces in front of their in-laws and all men. They are not permitted to talk to men and even their husbands in public. They are important so long as they are a useful part of the work force. Most of the decisions even about agricultural activities are taken by men. Women are responsible for all household work. The burden falls heaviest on the daughter-in-law. Women also look after children. They decide on schooling as well. Since women are often illiterate, they do not see the relevance of schooling and girls are not sent to school.

The Village

There are four major varnas (castes) in the social hierarchy of the Hindus. These varnas are further divided into jathis, which vary from place to place. In Silora there are about thirty jathis which fall under the various varnas. Of these castes or jathis, about 30 per cent are scheduled (lower) castes. The major castes are: the Brahmins (priests), Rajputs (rulers), Jats (farmers), Gujjars (herdsmen), Banias (Tradesmen), Khati (carpenters), Kumhar (potters), and amongst the scheduled castes: Chamar and Regers (leather workers), Balais (weavers), Bagria (scheduled tribe) and the Harijans (outcastes). The castes do not generally eat together or intermarry.

The Thakur or chief, who was a representative of the king in the village and the Rajputs who belong to his clan, usually dominate the socio-economic and political scene in the north of Silora. In the other areas, the powerful group are the rich farming community known as Jats. Land is unequally distributed though most people own land. Since the land is of poor quality, there is not much pressure on it. Family income has to be, and is, augmented by the children who become part of the work force by the time they are five years old.

Children begin to work on the farm or with animals and take care of younger brothers and sisters and are often precocious and know much about adult matters. They know about political and power groupings in a village, much more than may seem apparent to a casual observer. They grow up learning to protect themselves from pressures in a social structure that does not tolerate fools easily. These children who are literally rough and ready to fight are often looked upon as a troublesome bunch by both parents and teachers. It is obvious that a young boy of seven who takes twenty-five sheep to graze five kilometres away from home should learn to protect himself and be ready with his fist, in case he is threatened. He is generally not raring for a fight, but should it come, he gives as good as he gets.

Children do not take to the formal school kindly. They are often afraid of the teacher who is an outsider to the village. But it is the habit of corporal punishment in primary schools which is responsible for a large number of drop outs. Poverty, which does not permit the parents to buy uniforms and books for their children, is another obstacle in the way of primary schooling.

The Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC)

The Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) at Tilonia, Rajasthan is a voluntary organisation registered under the Societies Act, 1960 and is concerned with poverty and its eradication. The project which covers the area of Silora, began with the objective of starting a dialogue between the urban trained professionals and the rural communities. It believed that integrated rural development was possible through professional intervention in rural communities providing services for the

farmer and his family. In 1979 the SWRC reviewed its work and re-stated its objectives. This was a result of a critical self-evaluation of the service approach to rural development.

The redefined objectives of the SWRC state clearly that the project works only with the poor to increase their awareness and make them self-reliant. In this process, development services and training are used only to accelerate awareness and bring about social change.

When the project began, the founder viewed it also as an experiment that could offer a replicable pattern which other young people or groups could adopt to work in different parts of the country. The growth in size of the SWRC from a single project in one block to ten projects in ten blocks in seven States has been possible because of in-built flexibility and structural decentralisation.

All the projects in the various states and blocks are run independently of the main project at Tilonia with varied inputs determined by localised needs. The Project Directors get together four times a year and discuss mutual problems and concerns. The working ideology relates to the identification of a specific clientele, the poor, and in the firm belief that development work should eventually lead to social change. The operational aspects of the projects differ and are determined by the nature of the group working in that specific area.

One of the preoccupations of the SWRC has been the concept of integration. Integration is viewed by the SWRC not so much as the provision of services (though this is done), but as satisfying the integrated needs by planning for the community and not for programmes. The SWRC has a varied range of interests including agriculture and animal husbandry, health, education, co-operatives and the mobilisation of peasant groups.

When the scale of activities of the project at the SWRC Tilonia grew, the structure was reviewed critically. The major re-organisation of the SWRC at Tilonia concerned itself with two main areas. The first related to evolving a participatory decision-making process which would involve the workers and the community, and the second with decentralising the focus of activities from Tilonia to five focal points in the block, the Field Centres. These Field Centres are independent decision-making and implementing bodies. The workers of the five Field Centres as well as the specialised professional staff at the main centre meet once a month to consider major issues and take decisions on policy. The Field Centres are free to choose the methodology and identify the communities. All activities are part of an approach which is non-formal and which is based on community involvement. The SWRC believes in and focuses on education as the base for community involvement in planning.

Ten years after its inception, the SWRC Tilonia has been able to transfer gently much of its urban knowledge and skills to a group of local people. Education is, in fact, the basis on which any relevant development programme or activity can be built in an area where there is a high

degree of poverty and illiteracy. If the pattern of education does not consciously focus on projecting the issues related to development of the individual in society, it fails in its essential purpose.

When a small group of workers came to live in Tilonia to work for rural development, they identified this lack of awareness as one of the fundamental reasons for inaction. The malaise seemed to be linked to factors in the texture of village life which could be changed by exposing the children in their formative years to alternatives of which their parents were unaware. How could children be attracted to primary education and through a process of learning become responsible citizens, growing up and continuing to live in the village to work for its development and exploit their strength in numbers to demand attention to their needs? How could a community be involved in planning for itself? How could there be sharing of learning between the formally educated and the formally uneducated? And how could primary education be made more relevant to the villagers? Can the education system be made answerable or accountable to the community it serves? These were the questions never before asked.

The SWRC Night Schools

The SWRC's programme of alternative education for children fills the gap created by the formal pattern of education in the block. The formal schools do not run at times convenient to the children. The teachers who are normally from the towns, do not stay in the village and adjust their timing to the arrivals and departures of trains and buses. Most of the poorer members of the community are indifferent to the education given in the schools and only a few are persuaded to utilise the services.

This project was conceived in relation to the demands of development of a community, to learn to identify its needs and plan for itself. It became obvious that it would be necessary to make schooling more relevant to village life, to involve the parents in planning, to run the school at times convenient to the children, to select teachers from residents in the village and to evolve curricula and teaching methods related to the environment. The objective of the non-formal schools is to relate the learning needs to numeracy and literacy so as to prepare children to be active participants in the process of development, and to make them aware that there are alternative avenues for growth and development.

A preliminary study [1] was planned for three villages with the National Council for Education Research and Training (NCERT), the Centre for Educational Technology (CET) and the Government of Rajasthan. An initial survey showed that the villagers viewed the educational system in the villages as non-productive. Their reasons were sound. The system did not help the family in either producing employable sons or in learning more about their environment. Children who went to school became drop-outs from conventional village life. While they did not want to work in the same environment or in the same way as their parents, their skills in other fields were so poor that they could not face up to competition with children with access to better schools.

The schools themselves were badly run, the teacher came to school when he wished to, very often absenting himself as he did not live in the village, and the working methods he employed frightened the first few groups of learners who went to school. In this context it should be mentioned that while the father can exercise his paternal right to corporal punishment he is loath to share that right with a school teacher.

The project began in a small way with three experimental schools in 1975. It grew from three to nine in 1980, and from nine to twenty-nine in 1981. Each school is located in a village and the teachers are residents of that village. There are on an average two teachers to a school of about fifty pupils. The teachers in each Field Centre mentioned earlier meet every Saturday to discuss problems relating to teaching, their own understanding, making of aids, general developmental problems and administrative matters.

The problems discussed at the Field Centre by the teachers and other workers are often related to discussions held at Tilonia in the monthly meetings. These weekly and monthly discussions are, in fact, viewed by all those involved as an educational process which leads to greater clarity of concepts and ease of action. This sharing of a common concern leads to renewed enthusiasm for tackling problems in the field.

The Objectives

The programme began with very simple objectives which were related to the problems identified in relation to the existing village schools.[1] During the period of the preliminary study, an attempt was made to increase the enrolment, to retain the child in the school, reduce drop-outs and take care to avoid stagnation, determine the timings of the school in relation to community demands, involve the community in the school and develop school/community relationships, encourage use of the environment for all learning, recruit teachers from the village, provide work experience or relate the curriculum to the occupation of the child, and finally produce a replicable model for acceptance by the Government.

After the initial experimental period of three years, many questions were asked. These questions related to the role of education in the development process and the specific role of the night school in relation to the SWRC. One of the important reasons which led to the re-examination of the night school was the involvement of the teachers in planning and implementation of development programmes. When development issues began to be discussed, the importance of the night school as a nucleus of awareness building began to emerge as one of its primary functions. The method of learning drew on the environment of the child. The focus was broadened to relate learning to issues that emerged from development concerns as well. After many informal deliberations, the SWRC redefined the objectives of the night school.

The essential point of departure from a conventional literacy and numeracy programme began with a change in perception of the teacher and

the SWRC that the imparting of skills up to the level of standard V did not in any way satisfy the learning needs identified by the community. The community sees education, in terms of schooling, as a vehicle of social mobility or increased market value for employment. When it was realised that formal schooling did not satisfy either of these demands, the instinctive act was to reject the school. The community still sees schooling as relevant, only if children are not alienated from their surroundings. The school therefore has to reflect this concern. Hence it has to impart training in skills needed to relate learning to their day to day existence.

The schools are now seen not in isolation but as part of the overall process of education and awareness building in which the SWRC is involved. While the imparting of specific skills like literacy and numeracy continue to be important, the SWRC now sees the night schools as areas of basic learning where literacy and numeracy are used as tools to generate awareness about the community at large.

Concerned as the SWRC is with the basic question of poverty and illiteracy, the mere transferring of literacy and numeracy skills to children is not seen as an end in itself. These tools make access to development facilities more easy. Even so, the ultimate use of the facilities is largely determined by socio-political factors in society. Children have to perceive the linkages.

The Structure

The project is related to the overall structure of the SWRC. The night school programme is intimately connected with other development activities of the SWRC. The development activities of the SWRC are of an integrated nature and most of the people involved have to play multiple roles. The night school teachers, for instance, work in health and in organising farmers and their activities.

As the activities of the SWRC increased and intensified, the structure has been decentralised to five focal points in the block from where all the activities are co-ordinated and linked. The twenty-nine night schools are distributed over these five Field Centres and operate in clusters of five or six. The teachers identify training needs and share problems within a more localised area and discuss them in each Field Centre.

Working from the Field Centres has strengthened community participation. The involvement of the parents in development activities has sharpened their understanding of the need for education in general, and schooling for their children in particular. The parent's interest in the process of learning is slowly bringing them to the school for interaction with the teacher as well as the children. In this system, the role of the supervisor is as much one of learner as that of the teacher or the child. The teachers and the supervisors have multi-faceted relationships in which they interact over many development issues.

The Concept of "Non-Formal"

The definition of non-formal content and methodology began to get more meaningful when the linkages between development and education were stressed. Initially the SWRC accepted the concept of "non-formal" as that which implied efforts outside the formal system as regulated and controlled by the government. The debates that have been provoked over the use of the concept has sharpened the understanding of those concerned. It is currently being debated as to whether the schools which are run at night can really be called "non-formal". The word that is preferred by the SWRC is "alternative school".

Interestingly enough, the most useful meaning of these terms was elicited at a teachers' meeting held one Saturday in the Field Centre at Saleemabad. The small group of twelve teachers and development workers sat and tried to find a mutually acceptable definition of the concept. This led to lively discussion which lasted for over two hours. The assumptions were made confidently, and as the discussion were on it went from assertion to query. Even amongst a group of twelve, it was difficult to arrive at acceptable definitions. It was finally decided that the concepts would be broken into their relative components. The concepts were analysed as follows:

Formal is that method of education which has a fixed curriculum with a fixed objective of certification at the end of the learning period with rigid rules as to how that certification should be done. The method of teaching is restricted to covering a syllabus in a specified time. Teaching is viewed as course completion.

Non-Formal is that method of education which is determined by localised needs and is flexible. The syllabus is only for the guidance of the teacher and learning is linked with the environment. The non-formal approach to education aims at improving the quality of life of the child and is not primarily concerned with making him pass an examination. Curriculum is not binding. Learning is the most important aspect of non-formal education. Non-formal schools are not teaching shops. The role of the teacher in non-formal education is crucial and his training is important both in terms of his own understanding and growth and in how he relates to the learning needs of the children.

The use of rules and regulations do not necessarily make a school formal, because they have to be viewed as necessary minimal agreements to facilitate work for a group of people.

Identification of non-formal and learning needs have, of course, not removed the difficulties faced by the SWRC, the teacher or the child. Learning has successfully been related to the environment. But where the imparting of literacy and numeracy skills are concerned, teacher and taught alike have gone back to formal methods very often. The teacher does not easily accept his role as an initiator of learning in a community of children. Conditioned as he is by his own schooling in the formal system, teaching is initially viewed by him as a "Guru-Chela" (teacher-taught) relationship.

In brief, the non-formal characteristics of the night schools are inherent in its timings which are flexible and the ability to adapt the syllabus to the changing demands of the clientele and innovations resulting in improved methods of teaching.

The problems of resistance to non-formal methods and approach from the community and teacher alike may have been more rigid if the links between the school and other development processes had not existed. It is easier to change the approach of the teacher to education methods if he is allowed to participate in a number of activities in which he grows to understand and analyse the importance of relating methods and needs.

The Teacher and his Training

The teacher is selected by the village and the SWRC. His selection is based on two basic criteria. Most important, he has to belong and be acceptable to the village community and be respected by it. He also has to have enough literacy and numeracy to be confident about imparting those skills. The education criteria have been left flexible. The teachers range from 8th class (fail) which is a qualification, to MA (please see Table 1 on p.152). The experience of the SWRC has shown that teachers with a higher degree of formal education are not necessarily better either as teachers or learners.

These teachers come to Tilonia for a period of one month initially for training. The first 15 days of the month are spent on informal discussions on subjects ranging from socio-political problems in the village to methods of teaching. The first 15 days also cover a series of workshops in which learning situations are simulated and as a result of the experience gained, teaching aids are identified and made. After this, the teachers are sent back to their respective villages to conduct a survey of children in the age group 6-14, those in and out of school, their occupation, occupation of the parents, socio-economic status of the family, family size, literacy levels in the family, and gather any other relevant information. In the latter half of the training programme, the data are synthesised and a tentative plan of action drawn up. The teachers are exposed to evaluation methods, methods of monitoring as well as the maintenance of records.

The teachers are trained through regular meetings held thrice in a month at the Field Centres where they discuss problems relating to the school. Workshops are organised twice a year in which all the teachers from all the Field Centres meet to discuss and orient themselves about matters identified as relevant.[2]

The workshops are planned by the teachers. They were initially more structured, with teachers opting to take up specific issues for demonstration teaching with their own school or in another school. The themes were chosen from a list of difficult learning areas. Later on the workshops have been relatively unstructured, with a greater emphasis on learning skills of articulation and analysis of problems. The making of innovative aids has been an important part of the process. The most

important feature has been the sharing of experience over the three day period. The workshops have been organised by the SWRC as well as by other agencies. The Indian Institute of Pre-school Education and the NCERT have held workshops in which teachers from government schools were invited to participate[3].

Curriculum Development

When the project began, the SWRC adopted the syllabus of the Board of Education, Rajasthan. Agriculture and animal husbandry were included as part of the syllabus. The curriculum is being critically reviewed by the pupils, teachers and other workers of the SWRC and is expected to be in final shape in 1982-83. The involvement of the teachers in preparing the learning materials makes it a creative process. The syllabus had in its original form concentrated on schooling up to class V and on relating learning to the environment[4]. Instruction and learning materials were prepared keeping the environment in mind. Books were used only as supplementary reading. The syllabus was not changed totally, as the experiment was conducted with the intention of evolving a replicable model for implementation by the Rajasthan Government. The State Government however did not accept the concept and the lack of political support thwarted the programme.

The night schools, however, continue to be run by the SWRC and there has been considerable shift in attention as well as in emphasis. The teachers as well as the programme co-ordinators have felt the need for theoretically redefining and restructuring the curriculum on the basis of what has actually been practised in the schools in the last three years.

The Use of Local Resources and the Making of Aids

The SWRC believes that the villages are rich in resources for learning. The teachers have been motivated to identify and use these resources. Active participation in village life is not seen as separate from learning that takes place inside the classroom. The local singer, story-teller, midwife, health worker as well as many others are used as stimulators for learning. The teacher aims at involving the community as much as possible.

To make planning easy, the resources have been categorised into material and human resources, institutional and non-institutional. The SWRC has also conducted a study for UNESCO, Bangkok, on the identification of resources in Silora Block[5].

Media

Rajasthan is rich in folklore, theatre and puppetry. The SWRC has been using puppets as teaching aids. Children and teachers alike have been involved in puppet making, script writing and presentation of the programmes. The use of scientific and modern aids has been limited as they are often expensive and manufactured in an alien environment. However, slides and filmstrips made in Tilonia have sometimes been used for

learning. Traditionally the use of dance and puppetry for learning is viewed as frivolous. The communities' initial response was one of shock and displeasure. Gradually, however, the use of media in the night schools was accepted, and in the case of puppet shows, the demand has extended to shows for the entire village.

The SWRC has realised that media used for communication should be as familiar as possible. If the media chosen is part of the culture of the people, the message gets communicated better. This is not to say that technology should not be introduced, but that it should be used in moderation and only where appropriate.

The Learners

The children who attend the evening school fall between the ages of 8 and 14. They work during the day, the majority of them are goatherds and shepherds. There are some who work on their parents' farm. The attendance is fairly regular, except for some children whose parents lead a nomadic existence and leave the village for longish periods in search of fodder for their cattle. This is so particularly in drought years. Boys attend in large numbers. Girls attend school with difficulty, because motivation is low. The average literacy rate amongst the women is 3.5 per cent. It is therefore difficult to get women teachers and the absence of women teachers reduces girls' attendance. This area is feudal in culture. Women observe purdah, and do not talk to men in public places. It is difficult therefore to convince the mothers of the need to educate their girls. In spite of this, approximately 10 per cent of the pupils are girls. Girls are being persuaded to attend the pre-schools that the SWRC runs in the morning with the help of semi-literate women for children in the age group 1-6. Girls often come with their younger brothers and sisters and sit in with them.

Of the children who attend school, approximately 50 per cent are from socially under-privileged groups, though all children work during the day. Sitting together and sharing the pot of water with the upper castes is in itself an education for the children. In one school, the children had a mock election in which they elected the monitor on the basis of caste. The 'elected representative' was incompetent. The children were peeved and wanted to change the monitor. The teacher led the discussion on to the basis of a free election and the reasons which should dictate the election of a candidate. The children have learnt an excellent lesson about caste, the role it now plays in elections and why it should not be so.

The children are motivated to identify with the school. In many cases the unsympathetic attitude of an official in the village, which manifests itself in negative action like throwing the night school out of the formal school building or the place given by the Panchayat (village council), has been taken up by the children themselves with good effect.

There are 1,466 children attending the twenty-nine night schools in Silora (see Table 2).* The comparative figures of enrolment in the formal school and the attendance in the night school are given in the same source. The children still out of school are also indicated. It is interesting to note that the largest number attends the schools in Kadampura Field Centre, where the peasant organisation is most active.

The learning in areas related to everyday life is much quicker than in those where they are expected to relate to concepts that are unfamiliar. Literacy and numeracy skills take longest to perfect. The ability to do quick and intricate mental sums is not matched by an equal facility with written figures. The younger children get these skills with greater ease. Reading is comparatively easier. Children are given story books to read and to help retention of reading and writing skills are encouraged to keep a diary when they can find time for it during the day. The children who leave school are provided library facilities from the school. The SWRC also brings out a fortnightly 'read out' paper "Bagatri Baat" in the local dialect which is circulated to the school leavers.

The most obvious indicator of the children's capacity to understand and question is the apparent lack of inhibition with which they approach the learning process itself. They are curious and vocal. The night schools are quite often noisy in contrast with the formal school. The first visit often begins with an impression of chaos. It is only after a few minutes that the pattern emerges. The groups bunched around kerosene lamps with aids are talkative. The questioning of all new phenomena is encouraged. The teacher whose knowledge is often limited is provoked into making enquiries and acquiring information.

Evaluation

Where evaluation is concerned there are two distinct areas for consideration. Firstly, the evaluation of the children and secondly the evaluation of the project itself.

The evaluation of the children has been done both formally and informally. Children's literacy and numeracy skills have been evaluated through modified formal methods. The levels in other aspects of learning have been gauged through a number of methods including discussions, dialogues, object recognition and recall, articulation, leadership skills and informal discussions with the child in his occupational area. There is no obligation in terms of 'passing' or 'failing'. Children are grouped according to skill levels which are different for different areas of learning.

The project is continually evaluated by the teachers and the community in periodic meetings held both at the Field Centre and at the village. Formal evaluation of the project has also been done by outside agencies such as the Regional College of Education and the NCERT[6].

* on p. 152

While formal evaluation is of importance in proving one's credibility to those outside, the SWRC firmly believes that participatory evaluation is essential and crucial to the project's own development and growth. This is not viewed as a structured or time bound process. This attitude enables the SWRC to continually revise and change in relation to the needs of the community, and the growth in awareness of the teachers. Participatory evaluation is in fact seen as a process which leads not only to growth in the specific area of education but as a means of relating schooling to village life. It also includes exploring alternatives to the SWRC programme for the continued existence of the night school.

Continuing Learning and Replication

In a recent participatory evaluation of the project, sixty teachers of twenty-nine night schools, specialist staff of the SWRC and outside participants sat together to look at problems relating to replicability and continuing education. Since the project has to be independent of the SWRC at some stage, there was much discussion as to how the night schools would react to the closing of the SWRC itself, and whether the schools could continue to run and how. Support from Government through funding emerged as one of the viable alternatives.

The interesting issue that emerged for discussion was one that related to the teachers' commitment to actively continue this process independent of other considerations. In the ultimate analysis, the replicability of the project depends on the acceptance of the need for schooling by the community and this acceptance manifesting itself in demands for facilities from government. The SWRC has in its own way reacted to the demands for development by supporting groups of young people in several districts in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Orissa. The concept of the night school as experimented with by Tilonia has been accepted by many of the SWRC sub-centres located in other areas. A total of about fifty schools are being run in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh based on the same pattern with localised modifications.

Some of the pupils who have passed class V of the night school have been covered by other development activities of the SWRC. Some of them have been persuaded to take loans from the banks to buy goats and sheep, others have been trained in masonry work relating to sanitation and bio gas, some others have been trained in handpump installation and maintenance, and all of them continue to interact with the SWRC and the night schools in the village. Many of them come often to the night school to help the teacher and participate in group activities.

Comparative Costs

The actual running of the night schools works out to about Rs.10 per child per month. Viewed in relation to the amount of learning that the child gets, and if education is to be viewed seriously as the single largest input for development or social change, this seems a negligible amount.

As compared to the SWRC expenses, a Government primary school run at village Harmara near Tilonia has 276 pupils with 7 teachers who get a minimum take home pay of Rs.600. The total annual expenditure of the school is Rs.60,000. This works out to an approximate expenditure of Rs.217.39 per child.

Funding

Ideally the schools should be supported by the Government of India, or of Rajasthan, the state Government in whose jurisdiction the schools falls. Education in India is a State responsibility and the States are responsible for primary education. The variation in salaries between formal and non-formal teachers not only reflects the lack of understanding of the problem but also of the implicit evaluation by which the morning school which despite its failure to draw and retain children is given a pre-eminent position. The issue that arises is whether non-formal or alternative schools for under-privileged children are going to be viewed for all time as inferior or as requiring fewer inputs. A contradiction that emerges clearly is that on the one hand the non-formal or alternative school teacher is expected, though untrained, to use teaching aids and non-formal methods as well as identifying and using concepts from the environment but on the other hand that his skills as an educator are not recognised. This dilemma needs to be resolved in terms of the level of remuneration to the teacher, acceptance of the role of the night school in learning and development and a recognition of the teacher. The government and planners alike continue to raise questions about community participation and contribution in terms of financial support for the night schools. In a country like India where formal schooling is free in most States, the Government has already destroyed the notion of community contribution for schooling. In this context, it is very difficult for a night school to demand contributions in cash. The community provides space for the night schools, sometimes kerosene for the lamps, voluntary labour for building the school or contribution of produce from their land.

The project was initially funded by the NCERT. At the end of the project, government funds were not available and the project costs are now being raised from a British donor agency. In a recent meeting with the teachers, the scheme of assistance to voluntary organisations to universalise primary education mooted by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, was discussed. Though this means a fall in salary for the teachers and bringing down the expenditure of the Field Centres, the teachers are keen to procure government funds for the programme.

A Review

The SWRC night schools have so far been able to draw and retain children in the age group 6-14. But the number of girls attending the schools has not been enough. To stimulate interest in girls education, the SWRC has been working with mothers and grandmothers who take the decisions. The response has been slow. The mothers who are themselves illiterate, place a higher premium on boys' education. The boy is seen as a permanent member of the family and a future bread-winner. The girl is at best

a domestic help and a temporary member of the family who will eventually be married off. The motivation work with mothers has begun to achieve results through demands for girls' schooling, but the timing of the school and the nature of the curriculum may have to be different. The morning pre-schools which are run by women will be the focus of girls education in the future plans of the SWRC. The SWRC firmly believes that the teacher has to be a local man or woman and that they alone can bring children to the school. The ignorance of the adult has been identified as the main obstacle, and hence the SWRC has been working with women to make them literate and to educate them to manage the pre-schools.

The SWRC has been working with elementary education for children out of school with the intention of making education more relevant and thereby creating a demand for it from within the community. One of the important areas for attention has been the training of local youth and the transfer to them of skills and knowledge required to manage the night schools. The success of the project has not only been its ability to retain and develop its pupils, but its teachers as well. Talented teachers have grown to shoulder greater responsibility and offer leadership.

A Story and the Reasons Why

In most empirical observations of phenomena or in analyses of situations (case studies included), the "outside" presence does not often tell the whole story. Many of those who have been involved in activities within an identified community have found an interesting perceptual difference between those involved totally in the process and those who precipitate change. With this in mind a short narration by Lakshminarayan, one of the local participants in the project who has worked as a teacher, as a planner, and who is a respected member of the community, is presented.

Lakshminarayan's Story

"I am a resident of Phaloda, a village 2 kilometres from Tilonia. I was born into a family of priests and we have a village temple where I perform ceremonies. In my village, the main occupation is agriculture and cattle rearing. It is difficult to get water for the fields and for drinking. The land is unequally distributed. The cattle is owned by just a few people. About 60 per cent of the land and cattle belong to 10 per cent of the villagers. I do not own any land. The land that I till belongs to the temple. Social customs like funeral feasts and child marriage are strictly followed. These lead to never ending debts. We have to borrow money from local money lenders at high rates of interest.

In my village which is poor, there are farmers and herdsmen, some Rajputs (former ruling class), potters, weavers, leather workers, carpenters, priests, petty traders, and scheduled tribes. There is no social mixing between castes and this is also one of the reasons for poverty in my village. We have drinking wells (a separate one for each caste), a village tank which collects rain water for irrigation, and on the outskirts the village built of stone and lime some 15 years ago.

We have a formal morning school in our village. As a literate and responsible man in the community, I tried to encourage children to go to school. But I found that the children who went herding the cattle (theirs or others) or worked in the fields could not go to morning school. I started a class for children in the evening at the request of some parents.

Early years with SWRC

When the SWRC came to Tilonia in 1972, I met one of their social workers and this began my association with the SWRC as an adult literacy teacher. In 1974, when primary education was taken up as a major task of the SWRC, I began work as a teacher at the experimental school at Phaloda. In the initial years, I had my own doubts about the experiment. But when I got involved in the planning of the programme and attended meetings in Tilonia I was trained at the Regional College in Ajmer, in Tilonia, by the Indian Association of Pre-School Education and the NCERT, in New Delhi. I began to understand the value of non-formal methods for children who were first generation learners and who are frightened at the sight of a book. I also understood that teaching was the concern not only of the teacher but that parents and others in the village too should be used effectively for learning and teaching.

Primary Education in the Village

When I looked at my people and their children, I began to notice many things which had to be changed if we wanted to get all the children to go to school. The first thing we had to ensure was that school was run at a time convenient to the child. The child should be encouraged to feel confident when he enters the classroom. In a formal school, the first generation learner enters with a handicap. Everything that is of value inside a classroom springs from an alien culture. In my classroom, the children and I began by exchanging views about the village. The syllabus was of help only to me, as a teacher. I could not use the syllabus to teach the child. The environment is the most important source for learning concepts and I learnt to use it. The village elders and talented youth have to realise that they have a role in the school, that it can be for all a process of learning together. ' For instance, in my village, we seldom ate vegetables. But when I started teaching, we planted vegetables in the kitchen garden. We even dug a well. The village slowly got interested in the garden. Not only did the children eat the vegetables, but their parents began to see this was something which could bring them money. Now the village exports tomatoes. I see the night school as an important source of learning for the future generation; as places which will prepare children to be good citizens and to work together for a common purpose and teach them to use resources and facilities. In order to build up this confidence in the children the teacher should belong to the village to enable him to have easy access to the community in which he works.

The Teacher

I am a village teacher. I have only a Higher Secondary certificate and no formal training. When I first became involved with the primary education programme, I had to face gossip and mistrust from those of my villagers who had a higher degree of formal education and training than I. They thought it would not be possible for me to "compete" with the urban trained school teacher. Even I did not think that I could do so. After all, my knowledge was so limited. In the first six months of my training as a teacher, I learnt that I could be a competent teacher. At the end of the experimental phase, three years after the school had begun, I was willing to face evaluation by an impartial committee from any school in my region.

When later on I ceased to be a teacher and got involved with planning for primary education in the SWRC, I realised the important role that night school could play in making learning related to the realities of life. I came to understand what the word development meant and I saw my own part in it. I think that the night school is where development starts. As a one-time teacher if you ask me what is education I think I would say it is a process by which a child can create space around him by being able to see various ways of doing things and judging which is best for him (or her) and the life around. This is, to my mind, what development is about. It is difficult to fragment the nature of thought and action at the level of human beings. I am different at different times. I am a teacher, a learner, a priest, a development worker, a husband, a father, a responsible member in my community and I play different roles at different times. What I do in one area is definitely influenced by what I learn in the others. If it is so for myself, it is so for a programme, for an organisation, or for the country. At the level of my work there can be no success without combining the different roles demanded of me. To be relevant, the night school has therefore to prepare children not only to read and write but more important, to understand rural situations and look for alternative ways of tackling problems in the village. In this process, the school teacher and all of us in Tilonia who work specifically for health, education, agriculture and animal husbandry, poultry, rural crafts, women, intermediate technology and pre-schooling, see the night school as a point of common interest in building an awareness of our situations and why things are what they are.

In the last eight years that I have been at the SWRC, the programme has grown. From three experimental schools in three villages, we are now running twenty-nine night schools in as many villages. We have six groups of schools in a Field Centre and there are five such centres. The work in agriculture, education, pre-schooling, health and women conducted by these centres is co-ordinated by one person. I am now a Field Centre Co-ordinator. I now live in a village called Saleemabad, north west of Tilonia.

Our School

Our children wander in after an early supper at about 6 or 7 in the evening. Most of them have had a tiring day herding cattle or tending babies. The first thing they do is to group themselves on the floor around a kerosene lamp and have a chat.

Generally we have about fifty children with two teachers. The children are gradually grouped according to their learning skills and their areas of interest. While we concentrate and start discussions (maybe even have a smaller session with one or two groups), the rest are kept occupied with simple learning aids.

One day, not too long ago, I went to a school in Thal village. It was about 7.30 in the evening. The boys had already formed themselves into various groups, one of which was working on problems related to arithmetic. I sat down and started talking to the children. Mangilal looked a bit troubled. He looked after his uncle's fifty head of cattle and took them five miles away from home looking for fodder trees (kejri) and a bit of green. Sometimes when there was a growing field of corn or gram, millets or wheat which was unguarded, he might let his cattle in for a brief while. What would then happen? Was it right to let his animals graze on standing crops? And what would happen if he was caught?

The boy explained that his father had taken a loan from the village co-operative. Years later when he could not repay it, he was threatened with legal action and he had to borrow money from his uncle to repay it. His uncle lent his father the money at a prohibitive interest rate of 25 per cent per annum. His father could not even pay the interest and in return for waiving the interest, the boy was bonded. In the discussion that followed the implications of bonded labour and the alternatives that were available were discussed. What emerged was a discovery by the boy. He could seek another job in which perhaps he would earn enough money to repay the interest and yet save money for himself. All of us knew that there was a minimum wage, and this idea seemed practical.

Two weeks later, I went back to the same village and found that this boy had persuaded his father to allow him to work independently. Part of his wages went as payment to his uncle and the rest was used by his family.

We encourage the community to take part in the life of the school. Various local officials have visited the school; they have explained the procedure for revenue collection and details of land record maintenance, the value of trees, the cross breeding of cows and use of hybrid seeds. Methods of banking have been explained by village experts. The SWRC personnel have visited the school and have explained simple technological methods thus getting the children interested in getting to know more. Soil samples have been taken for examination in the Tilonia laboratories and tested.

The children have made visits to institutions in the community. At a bank they were shown what business was done at each counter and how loans were given. They were taken to the railway station and the

functioning of the railways and the duties of passengers in making the railways more effective were explained. At the post office, they learnt about letters, money-orders and registration, and were fascinated by the telephone and the telegraph machine. Some children wrote themselves postcards, posted them, and were thrilled to receive them the next day. Visits to a demonstration farm were particularly important to create interest in new farming methods. In all these visits, the children learnt many things that they did not know. I myself learnt a lot from these visits. Even though I had passed my Higher Secondary examination, I was not confident about filling in a money order form and was scared to talk on a telephone. I find from my experience that in my school, among children, fear of the unknown is a major block in learning. I feel that giving new experiences is important for the child's growth but they must be given at the rate the child can accept.

Our Training

The first thing we do after we have been chosen as a teacher is to go to Tilonia and spend 15 days learning many new ideas and carefully questioning accepted beliefs and ways of doing things. We learn to question those whom we had traditionally accepted as more learned whether they be experts from the cities, government officers or the social elite. It is a difficult process. In the first few days of our training, we find it awkward to question and contradict the college graduates in Tilonia. We gradually got to know that learning is a continuous process, that the resource persons or specialists may have various areas of strengths but they also have weaknesses. They may have academic knowledge, but we know more than they do about the community. Without our co-operation, no action is possible. We learn to share our experiences. We realise that in the classroom we will be in the same position as the resource person. A child who comes to learn from us in the classroom may very often know much more than we do.

After the fifteen days at Tilonia, we go back and survey the village. We identify the number of children in the age group 6-14, the number in and out of school, the educational and social and financial status of the family and its occupation. We then come back to Tilonia for the second half of the training.

We are given a syllabus or a programme of lessons and the underlying ideas of each area of knowledge are explained to us. We learn to use the surroundings as the main teaching aid, and use the children themselves and their experience as the main starting points for learning. To help us teach, we prepare projects . For instance, we have a project on the Panchayat which is our village council. The Panchayat is then used as a means of teaching a child about political status and social rights while he is also learning history (feudal history of Rajasthan and present democracy), geography (village size, area, directions), agricultural patterns, the planting and care of trees, health and sanitation, arithmetic and language. If there are things we do not understand or have a problem related to the classroom, we get help from the weekly meetings that we have for teachers at the Field Centre.

Our visits to the villages are friendly occasions for discussing many things, apart from the main purpose, which is to see how the children are progressing. We therefore make use of all village situations to talk about other ways of doing or looking at things. We meet the fathers and mothers informally at the village tea stall, marriage feasts and village fairs. We also visit them in their homes. It is then that we talk about the attendance of their child in school and other related problems.

Teacher and I

It is true that the gap between me and the teachers is small. We have the same background and share the same culture. But I have changed. Sometimes it is difficult for me to transfer my enthusiasm to my newer colleagues. Some of the new recruits who are products of the traditional system continue to look at the school as a means of passing exams so as to get better jobs. They are uneasy about teaching through aids. However, because they have had training and have discussions on all matters relating to village life, they have now become as teachers more confident. These sessions of the teachers every month are very useful. Once every six months, we have a workshop. In this workshop, all the teachers have to present a paper or conduct a session. When they attended a NCERT workshop together with primary school teachers in Tilonia in 1980 we found that the night school teachers were in fact more alive to problems and much better able to think and speak more clearly than the others. They as a group and as individuals began to see that learning and formal certification need not necessarily be connected. The confidence in themselves and in their own ability to react, think and express themselves is the first step in making the teachers participate actively in the learning process.

I sometimes wonder whether the teachers trained in non-formal methods will lose their skills if they are not in constant touch with small learning groups. It is not the size of the entire programme that decides whether or not they are good teachers. It is the care that is given to the individual person that is so important. So long as a small group of people can talk things over and work together, the programme will continue to be a success. Teaching materials and other requirements could easily be provided. But the effort of Tilonia has been to make it possible for each individual teacher to find out for himself what needs to be taught. The learning process is determined by children's needs and the teacher's own choice of methods."

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TILONIA : AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

Table 1, showing the data relating to teachers in the SWRC Night Schools in Silora Block

Name of the Field Centre	No. of Night Schools	No. of Teachers	Age Group		Caste		Qualification			Occupation			
			18-35	35 & above	Scheduled caste/tribe, other backward castes	Others	School/ Higher Secondary	Higher Secondary/BA	BA/ above	Agriculture	House-holder	Students	Others
TILONIA	5	11	11	-	1	10	8	2	1	5	3	-	3
SALEEMABAD	6	10	9	1	2	8	10	-	-	9	-	1	-
CHOTANARAINA	6	13	12	1	3	10	13	-	-	10	-	2	1
KOTRI	5	9	8	1	2	7	9	-	-	9	-	-	-
KADAMPURA	7	13	11	2	3	10	12	1	-	12	-	1	-

Table 2, showing village population, children's population in the age group 6-14 and the number attending formal day school and the SWRC night school in 26 villages in Silora Block

Field Centres	No. of Night Schools and Villages	Total Population of the village	No. of children in the age group 6-14	No. of children in		No. of children out of school (6-14)
				Government	SWRC Night Schools	
TILONIA	5	10,268	1,658	639	281	738
SALEEMABAD	5	3,852	1,018	189	211	618
CHOTANARAINA	6	9,841	2,223	637	288	1,298
KOTRI	5	3,603	1,186	229	262	695
KADAMPURA	5	3,381	697	126	286	285

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