

**COMPULSORY PRIMARY EDUCATION**

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**JAYAKUMAR ANAGOL**

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## PRIMARY EDUCATION BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The credit for being the pioneer for giving the call for making education universal goes to Martin Luther. He believed that every human being should be able to read the Bible for herself/himself. In 1524 he pleaded with the Germanic States that it was their duty to provide schools; at the same time he called upon the parents to educate their children as a matter of duty. The colony of Massachusetts in the United States passed a law compelling local authorities to introduce Compulsory Elementary Education in 1647. Sweden passed a legislation in 1723 that parents and guardians who do not send their children to school will be liable to fines. Most developed countries introduced legislation to make elementary education compulsory well before the end of the 19th century.

The inspiration for the introduction of Compulsory Primary Education has differed from country to country, though all of them are united on its importance. The Prussian State wanted its children to improve their health and education for achieving effective military service. In France, it was the ideology of secularism of the French Revolution which provided the basis for the introduction of mass education so that the educational system would be with the State and not with the Church. In Meiji Japan, the motivation for universalisation of education was two-fold--the ambition of the ruling class to compete with the west and at the same time, to inculcate loyalty to the State. The Communist countries who wanted to build a new civilisation with an entirely altered class structure insisted on the universalisation of education as a means to achieve this goal. (Myron Weiner; Child Labour in India, Putting Compulsory Education on the Political Agenda, Economic and Political Weekly, November 9-16, 1996). India is a multi-ethnic,

multi-lingual, multi-religious secular socialist state. Hence in our case the ideology for the introduction of Compulsory Primary Education is the building up of a plural democratic polity on an equitable basis along with the objectives of human and economic development of its citizens.

### BEGINNING OF MODERN EDUCATION IN INDIA

By the early part of the 19th century, the East India Company had established its hegemony over a large part of the Indian sub-continent. There were two views in the Company regarding the development of education. One was that the indigenous Hindu and Muslim systems of education should be continued and encouraged, as it was in consonance with the Company's approach of non-interference in the religious and social systems of India. The other view pleaded for the introduction of the western system of education. Macaulay had a deep prejudice against oriental learning. He proclaimed that "a single shelf of a good European Library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia". He had full faith in the whiteman's burden. He thought that his proposal contained in his *Mimute on Education* would create "the class of persons - Indian in blood and colour but English in opinions, in morals and in intellect". Raja Ram Mohan Roy supported vigorously introduction of western system of education on the ground that it would open doors of modern knowledge of science and technology. One of the practical aspects of introducing modern education, to be given through the English medium, was to provide personnel like clerks and middle level officials in helping to run the Raj. In the end the champions of the western system of education prevailed. It is worth noting that right from the beginning the emphasis has been on higher education at the cost of mass education. The famous Wood's Despatch of 1854 streamlined and consolidated the western system of education.

### PLEAS FOR MASS EDUCATION

Raja Ram Mohan Roy believed as much in the education of women as of men. Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar championed the cause of female education. Swami Dayananda Saraswati was probably the first Indian champion, of Compulsory Primary Education for all, including women and scheduled castes. He has stated in his magnum opus, *Satyarth Prakash* published in 1875,

"both state and society should make it compulsory to send their children (both boys and girls) to school after the 5th or at the most 8th year of age and to keep them there for the period prescribed, i.e., upto the age of 23 for boys and 16 for girls. It should be made a penal offence to keep a child at home after that age. In order to produce the highest type of socialised and civilised individual, all artificial distinctions of the rich and the poor, the prince and the peasant, the Brahman and the Shudra are to be levelled up". The Muslims who lost to the British a large part of India did not take kindly to modern education. It was only through the efforts of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan that a section of them started taking interest in modern education.

### JOTI RAO PHULE'S REVOLUTIONARY PROPOSALS

Mahatma Joti Rao Phule was a man way ahead of his time. His proposals on compulsory primary education submitted to the First Indian Commission (Hunter Commission) are as relevant to-day as they were in 1882. He pleaded for (1) Spread of female education on a large scale, (2) Spread of education among Mahars, Mangs and other lower classes, that is, scheduled castes and backward castes, (3) Spread of education among minorities like Muslims and (4) Spread of education in rural areas.

He criticised the greater emphasis given by the British on higher education at the cost of basic education and argued that 50% of the budget should be earmarked for primary education. He wanted that education should be reoriented to emphasise training of manual skills along with training of cognitive skills. He pleaded for instruction on technical education, morality, sanitation, agriculture and some useful arts. All the deficiencies pointed out and the programmes advocated by him are as relevant to-day as they were 115 years ago when <sup>he</sup> ~~his~~ made the submission to the Hunter Commission. (Jotirao Phule - Collected Works - Vol.II, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra.)

Dadabhai Naoroji, the grand old man of India pleaded forcefully before the same Commission for the introduction of mass education.

### COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN PRINCELY STATES

The credit for being the pioneer in introducing Compulsory Primary Education in India goes to the Princely State of Baroda which implemented the programme in 1905. Following Baroda, the enlightened rulers of the State of Mysore introduced Compulsory Primary Education on a selective basis in the year 1913. Visveswaraya took keen interest in its implementation during his Dewanship. It was however, discontinued in the year 1920, on ground of financial stringency and on the ground that it reduced the funding available for expansion of primary education in the rural areas since compulsory primary education was confined to cities and towns. Thereafter also, some halting efforts to introduce compulsion were made and given up.

### GOKHALE'S CAMPAIGN FOR COMPULSORY EDUCATION:

A cause very dear to the heart of Gopal Krishna Gokhale was the universalisation of elementary education throughout the length and breadth of the country. Even while he was barely 30 years of age he made a fervant plea for the introduction of elementary education on a mass scale while addressing the Bombay University Graduates Association in 1896. He said "To us it (the primary education) means the future salvation of the country. Universal education alone could help the farmer to resist exploitation by the money lender, to improve sanitation, to shake off superstition, to increase his earning capacity, to take an intelligent interest in public affairs and *remove the reproach that Indian public life was the monopoly of a tiny minority*".

In 1910, at the first meeting of the Imperial Council, Gokhale proposed that "a beginning should be made in the direction of making elementary education free and compulsory throughout the country". Since the Government assured that it will carefully consider his proposal, Gokhale withdrew the resolution. By introduction of this resolution, Gokhale succeeded in putting the case for compulsory education on the National Agenda. It was discussed widely in the news papers. It was taken note of by both the National Congress and the All India Muslim League. Next year Gokhale introduced a private member's bill on Elementary Education. The Bill was circulated for eliciting public opinion. Gokhale visited important cities to mobilise public opinion in favour of the Bill. Even the Viceroy Hardinge was deeply impressed. He expressed the hope



that free elementary education would be introduced in India before he left the country. However most of the Governors of states stoutly opposed the Bill. The Governor of Bombay told the Viceroy that the agitation for primary education is of recent origin and comes from people who are anxious to make British rule impossible. The Bill, as expected by Gokhale, was defeated with 13 votes in its favour and 38 against. However, Gokhale expressed his conviction by stating "This Bill thrown out to-day will come back again and again till on its stepping stones of its dead shelves, a measure ultimately arises which will spread the light of knowledge throughout the land". (B.R. Nanda; Gokhale, The Indian Moderates and British Raj, Princeton University Press) With the introduction of diarchy in 1917, Bombay Presidency was the first to pass the Compulsory Primary Act. Some other provinces also followed suit. However these Acts were only enabling legislations, empowering the local bodies to introduce compulsion if they chose. Most of the local bodies did not bother to introduce compulsion and where introduced, the implementation was perfunctory.

#### **MAHATMA GANDEHI AND BASIC EDUCATION**

The next landmark in the history of Indian education was the system of Basic Education proposed by Mahatma Gandhi in 1937. Gandhiji described the essentials of his new system of education as follows:-

(1) English having been made the medium of instruction in all the higher branches of learning has created a permanent gap between the highly educated few and the uneducated many. Absence of vocational training has made the educated class almost unfit for productive work and has harmed them physically.

(2) *The course of primary education should be extended at least to 7 years and should include the general knowledge aimed at the Matriculation standard less English and in addition a substantial vocation.*

(3) For the all-round development of boys and girls all training should, as far as possible, be given through a profit yielding vocation. In other words, vocations should serve a double purpose - to enable the pupil to pay for his tuition through the products of his labour and at the same time to develop the whole man or woman through the vocation learnt at school.

He further stated "I am a firm believer in the principle of free and compulsory primary education for India. I also hold that we shall realise this by teaching the children a useful vocation and utilising it as a means for cultivating their mental, physical and spiritual faculty." Basic education, therefore, laid emphasis on 3 Hs - the development of Head, Heart and Hand. It aimed at intellectual, moral and skill developments.

#### **SARGENT REPORT:**

The Central Advisory Board of Education set up by the British Government prepared in 1944 a Post-War Plan for educational development. The Post-war Plan visualised achieving over a period of 40 years a standard of educational attainment as had already been achieved in England. With this end in view, it recommended pre-primary education for children between 3 and 6 years of age and free primary or basic education for all children between the ages of 6 and 14, divided into the junior basic (6 and 11) and senior basic (11 to 14) stages. The report emphasised the importance of universalisation of education and human resources development by quoting with approval the Chinese saying "If you are planning for one year, plant grain; if you are planning for 10 years plant trees; if you are planning for 100 years plant men". The report strongly pleaded for the introduction of free and compulsory primary education but expressed its opinion that the task can be completed only over a period of 40 years.

#### **LITERACY LEVELS AT THE END OF COLONIAL RULE**

After more than 100 years of introduction of modern education by colonial administration, the progress of primary education as measured by the literacy rate was abysmally low. The rate of literacy in 1881 was 6.3%. R.V. Parulekar has pointed out that even during 1931 the literacy rate was less than 10% among adults and no more than 2% among women. This shows

that little growth in literacy had occurred since 1881. At the time of independence in 1947 it is estimated that less than 15% of the adult population was literate. The rate of literacy increased to 16.6% for the year 1951. Literacy rate for women in 1951 was 7.9% and for men 24.9%. The total percentage of literacy varied among the then major States from a low figure of 8.93% in Rajasthan to a high figure of 40.73% in Kerala. Women's literacy rate varied from a low 2.98% in Rajasthan to a high 31.48% in Kerala (Table 1). Let it be noted that the literacy rates do not indicate the number of persons who have completed the primary cycle of education. They are used as rough and ready indicators of persons who have had at least a modicum of primary education. More details about this will be explained in a subsequent chapter.

TABLE .1  
LITERACY RATES OF MAJOR STATES, 1951

| States                       | Persons | Percentage of literacy |       |         |
|------------------------------|---------|------------------------|-------|---------|
|                              |         | Rank                   | Males | Females |
| INDIA                        | 16.60   |                        | 24.9  | 7.9     |
| Andhra Pradesh               | 13.1    | 10                     | 19.7  | 6.5     |
| Assam                        | 18.3    | 7                      | 27.4  | 7.9     |
| Bihar                        | 12.2    | 11                     | 20.5  | 3.8     |
| Gujarat                      | 23.1    | 3                      | 32.3  | 13.5    |
| Himachal Pradesh             | 7.7     | 15                     | 12.6  | 2.4     |
| Jammu & Kashmir              | --      | --                     | --    | --      |
| Karnataka                    | 19.3    | 6                      | 29.1  | 9.2     |
| Kerala                       | 40.7    | 1                      | 50.0  | 31.5    |
| Madhya Pradesh               | 9.8     | 13                     | 16.2  | 3.2     |
| Maharashtra                  | 20.9    | 4                      | 31.4  | 9.7     |
| Orissa                       | 15.8    | 8                      | 27.3  | 4.5     |
| Punjab(including<br>Haryana) | 15.2    | 9                      | 21.0  | 8.5     |
| Rajasthan                    | 8.9     | 14                     | 14.4  | 3.0     |
| Tamil Nadu                   | 20.8    | 5                      | 31.7  | 10.0    |
| Uttar Pradesh                | 10.8    | 12                     | 17.4  | 3.6     |
| West Bengal                  | 24.0    | 2                      | 34.2  | 12.2    |

Source: Census of India 1951

Note: Literacy Rate is for age group 5 and above.

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## AFTER INDEPENDENCE

### DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY

Indian leaders like Dadabhai Navroji and Joti Rao Phule had pleaded for compulsory primary education in the 1880s. During the first part of the 20th Century, Gopalakrishna Gokhale and Mahatma Gandhi had championed it most forcefully. Naturally, the founding fathers of our Constitution had to take a stand on this important issue. The proceedings of the Constituent Assembly throw light on this subject. The Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly on Fundamental Rights had, after due consideration, placed the right to education among justiciable fundamental rights. The proposed Article stated "Every citizen is entitled as of right to free primary education and it shall be the duty of the State to provide within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this Constitution for free and compulsory primary education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years". However, it was later decided not to include the right to education as a fundamental right on the ground that the Government may not be able to provide the required funds and hence the right to education was included in the Directive Principles of State Policy as Article 45 of the Constitution. It reads: "The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years".

Professor K.T. Shah, a member of the Fundamental Rights Sub-Committee wrote a note of dissent and expressed his apprehension that, "The non-justiciable rights to which education was now relegated would remain as no more than so many pious wishes. Given this differentiation, the Union and State Governments will be encouraged to stress or invent excuses why any of these non-justiciable rights should not be given effect to. By keeping them on the Statute Book without making them imperative obligations of the State towards the citizen, we would be perpetrating a needless fraud, since it would provide an excellent window dressing without any stock behind that dressing." (Nalini Juneja: Constitutional Commitments - Seminar April 1998).

The Directive Principle of State Policy nevertheless cast a moral responsibility on the States of making primary education compulsory. Compulsory education Acts have been enacted in several States and Union Territories of India both before and after independence. However, it has been a lackadaisical attempt, as most of these legislations are merely enabling legislations which authorise local bodies like Municipal Councils and Zilla Panchayats to introduce compulsion in their jurisdiction. Some local authorities in these States did make efforts to introduce compulsion in their jurisdiction. But with the passage of years, the implementation of compulsory primary education acts has fallen into disuse even in States which initiated the legislation. As the constitutional right to free and compulsory primary education was only a Directive Principle of State Policy, the states could get away without implementing the programme.

#### **JAWAHARLAL NEHRU AND THE MAHALANOBIS MODEL**

The first national plan was in essence a patch work of various schemes of post-war reconstruction drawn up by the colonial government. The new strategy for national development took shape only with the launching of the second Plan based on the Mahalanobis model. But this plan gave little importance to education in general and in particular to primary education. In fact, it considered education and health services as social services, with the result that whenever there was a cut in plan expenditure, it affected these sectors the most. Hence, the apt comment of Prof. J. K. Galbraith "Once it was understood an educated populace is the first requirement for economic progress. That essential fact was forgotten: impressive steel mills, great hydro-electric dams were too often cited amid ignorant people. I have previously made the point that in this world there is no literate population that is poor, no illiterate population that is other than poor." The only amendment one might suggest to Prof. Galbraith's conclusion is that "There is no literate population that is not developed, no illiterate population that is other than developed".

#### **NEGLECT OF PRIMARY EDUCATION BY NEHRU**

It is indeed surprising that Jawaharlal Nehru who was influenced by the leftist ideology did not heed the exhortation of Lenin who had said immediately after the October Revolution that, "Revolution is Literacy plus Electricity". - All communist countries have mounted successfully

vigorous programmes of universalisation of elementary education and adult literacy. Vietnam fought two wars, first against France and then against the United States, the foremost super power in the world. In spite of its war torn economy and poverty it has attained a literacy rate exceeding 90%!

Neglect of primary education by Nehru is also evidenced by the fact that under his Prime Ministership the first Commission in independent India to be set up related to University Education and the second Commission related to Secondary Education. No Commission on Primary Education *per se* was set up, though it had been championed by such eminent Indians like Swamy Dayanand Saraswati, Joti Rao Phule, Dadabhai Navroji, Gopalakrishna Ghokhale and Mahatma Gandhi. Hence, the lament of Gill "No area of reform was more important for a resurgent India than mass education and in none was Nehru's failure more pronounced. And if Nehru did not perceive the feminal value of mass education, none of his successors could." (S.S. Gill - The Dynasty - A Political Biography of the Premier Ruling Family of Modern India).

#### **EDUCATION COMMISSION (1964-66)**

The third Commission (Kothari Commission) to be set up was the Education Commission (1964-66), which had to take a comprehensive view of the entire gamut of education beginning from pre-primary to university education. It recommended 5 years of good education for all children to be achieved within ten years and 7 years of education within 20 years. Yet another important recommendation of the Kothari Commission was the concept of neighbourhood school which required all the children living in the catchment area to attend it. It favoured work experience as an integral part of general education and pleaded for vocationalisation of education at the secondary level. Based on the recommendations of the Kothari Commission the National policy of Education was formulated in 1968.

#### **EDUCATION IN THE CONCURRENT LIST**

In 1976, education was placed in the concurrent list. With this change primary education could lay claim to funding not only from the states whose financial resources are limited but also from the centre. This is crucial as states which are both financially and educationally backward need to provide much higher outlays for financing the universalisation of elementary education.

## NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION 1986 (AS MODIFIED IN 1992)

The National policy on Education 1986 identified the sectors which needed special support as they were lagging far behind the general level of educational attainment. They were:

III\* Education for Women's equality: The removal of Women's illiteracy and obstacles for their access to education and prevention of detention in elementary education should be given over-riding priority by providing special support services.

IV Education for Scheduled Castes: The important measures contemplated to raise the educational level of scheduled castes included:

- (i) Incentives to poorer sections of S.C. families to send their children to school.
- (ii) Recruitment of teachers from scheduled castes.
- (iii) Suitable location of school building, balawadi and adult educational centres to facilitate full utilisation by the Scheduled Castes.

V Education of Scheduled Tribes: The measures recommended were:

- (i) High priority to be accorded to opening primary schools in tribal areas.
- (ii) Developing curricula and instructional materials in tribal languages.
- (iii) Training and appointing scheduled tribe teachers.
- (iv) Provision on liberal scale of anganwadi /non-formal and adult educational centres in areas inhabited by scheduled tribes.

VI\* Emphasis was also proposed to be given to the education of backward sections and areas, minorities and the handicapped.

VII\* The new thrust in elementary education was to be on

- i) Universal access and enrolment.
- ii) Universal retention of children up to fourteen years of age.

- iii) Improvement in the quality of education and
- iv) School facilities to be improved by providing all schools with at least three rooms and three teachers, as against two rooms and two teachers proposed under the programme of "Operation Black Board".

The new education policy sought to ensure that free and compulsory education of a satisfactory quality is provided to all children up to the age of fourteen years before entering the 21st century. District Institutes of Education and Training (DIET) would be established for improving teacher education both in its pre-service and in service stages. They were also to provide training for personnel working in non-formal and adult education areas.

#### **DISTRICT PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME**

District Primary Education Programme was started in 1993 with financing from External Agencies. This was the first time foreign funds were utilised on a massive scale for educational development at the primary stage. The programme is meant to encourage decentralised planning with major participation of local bodies, NGOs and the community. Districts selected under the programme were the backward districts where female literacy was below the national average. The programme emphasised education for girls and for socially backward groups. It laid special emphasis on improving the quality of education.

#### **PROGRESS DURING THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE**

The total enrolment in the primary and upper primary schools has increased from 22.3 millions in 1950-51 to 147.3 millions in 1994-95, about six and a half times. The enrolment of girls during the same period has increased from 5.9 millions to 61.6 millions, is ten and a half times. The number of primary and upper primary schools has increased from 2,23,000 schools in 1950-51 to 7,45,000 in 94-95. The total enrolment of boys and girls at the primary stage which was 42.6 per cent in 1950-51 has risen to 104.3 per cent in 95-96 and enrolment in upper primary schools has risen from 12.7 per cent in 1951 to 67.6 per cent in 95-96. The enrolment in the elementary stage, that is, from class I to class VIII has improved from 32.1 per cent in 1951 to 90.9 per cent



in 95-96. (MHRD 1996 Selected Educational Statistics 1995-96). The literacy rate at 16.60 per cent, that is, below 20% in 1951 has gone up to 52.2 per cent, thereby crossing the 50 per cent mark in 1991. The Indian educational enterprise is one of the largest in the world. Taking into consideration the increases in the total enrolment of boys and girls, the gross enrolment ratio, the number of schools and the literacy rate, it is claimed that India has made substantial progress since independence.

The Directive Principles of State Policy laid down that the State should provide free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of fourteen years by 1960. The Kothari Commission on education proposed that compulsory education of five years duration be achieved by 75-76 and of eight years duration by 1985-86. National Policy on Education as modified in 1992 had indicated that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality should be provided to all children up to fourteen years before entering the 21st century. The Lok Sabha, on the occasion of the Golden jubilee of independence, adopted inter alia, the resolution that universal primary education may be achieved by 2005, that is five years after the dawn of the new millennium. The National Agenda of the BJP and its allies, who are in power states, "We will implement the constitutional provision of making primary education free and compulsory up to 5th standard." The Constitutional provision envisaged free and compulsory primary education up to 14 years of age that is of 8 years duration to be achieved by 1960, but now we have the promise of the party in power to provide 5 years of education but without fixing a target date!

Other features of our dismal performance in universalisation of primary education are:-

(1) Literacy rate of 51% in India in 1994 is lower not only in comparison to East Asian, South East Asian and West Asian Islamic countries but also it is lower than the literacy rate of 56% of Sub-Saharan African countries. India now has slipped into the group of the least developed countries of the world. (Table 2)

(2) What is more distressing is that there are wide disparities among Indian States.

Literacy rate varies from Kerala's 89.1% to Bihar's 38.48%. The major States in India having literacy rates lower than the literacy rates of least developed countries are Bihar (38.48%), (2) Rajasthan (38.5%), (3) Uttar Pradesh (48.60%), (4) Andhra Pradesh (44.0%) and (5) Madhya Pradesh (44.20%). The total population of these States is 25.56 crores (Table 3)

Table-2

LITERACY RATES OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, 1994

|                   |     |                               |       |
|-------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-------|
| EAST ASIA         |     | SOUTH EAST ASIA               |       |
| S. KOREA          | 98% | THAILAND                      | 93%   |
| N. KOREA          | 95% | VIETNAM                       | 93%   |
| CHINA             | 81% | MALAYSIA                      | 83%   |
|                   |     | INDONESIA                     | 83%   |
|                   |     | MYANMAR                       | 82%   |
| ISLAMIC WEST ASIA |     | SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA            |       |
| JORDAN            | 85% | ZIMBABWE                      | 85%   |
| SYRIA             | 70% | SOUTH AFRICA                  | 81%   |
| IRAN              | 69% | KENYA                         | 77%   |
| SAUDI ARABIA      | 62% | ZAMBIA                        | 77%   |
| IRAQ              | 58% | ZAIRE                         | 76.0% |
| SOUTH ASIA        |     |                               |       |
| SRI LANKA         | 90% |                               |       |
| INDIA             | 51% |                               |       |
| BANGLA DESH       | 37% |                               |       |
| PAKISTAN          | 37% |                               |       |
|                   |     |                               |       |
|                   |     | ALL DEVELOPING COUNTRIES      | 70%   |
|                   |     | SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES | 56%   |
|                   |     | INDIA                         | 51%   |
|                   |     | LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES     | 48%   |

Source: Human Development Report 1997 (UNDP OXFORD)

Note: Literacy rates are for the age group 15 and above.

TABLE:3  
LITERACY RATES OF MAJOR STATES, 1991

| STATES           | ALL     |      |       |        |       |       |       |       |
|------------------|---------|------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                  | Persons | Rank | Male  | Female | S.C   | S.T   | Rural | Urban |
| INDIA            | 52.21   |      | 64.23 | 39.29  | 37.41 | 29.60 | 44.69 | 73.08 |
| Andhra Pradesh   | 44.09   | 13   | 55.13 | 32.72  | 31.59 | 17.16 | 35.74 | 66.35 |
| Assam            | 52.89   | 10   | 61.87 | 43.03  | 53.94 | 49.16 | 49.32 | 79.39 |
| Bihar            | 38.48   | 16   | 52.49 | 22.18  | 19.49 | 26.78 | 33.83 | 67.89 |
| Gujarat          | 61.29   | 5    | 73.13 | 48.64  | 61.07 | 36.45 | 53.09 | 76.54 |
| Haryana          | 55.85   | 9    | 69.01 | 40.47  | 39.22 | --    | 49.85 | 73.66 |
| Himachal Pradesh | 63.86   | 3    | 75.36 | 52.13  | 53.20 | 47.09 | 61.86 | 84.17 |
| Jammu & Kashmir  | --      | --   | --    | --     | --    | --    | --    | --    |
| Karnataka        | 56.04   | 8    | 67.26 | 44.34  | 38.06 | 36.01 | 47.69 | 74.20 |
| Kerala           | 89.81   | 1    | 91.62 | 86.17  | 79.66 | 57.22 | 88.92 | 92.25 |
| Madhya Pradesh   | 44.20   | 12   | 58.42 | 28.85  | 35.08 | 21.54 | 35.87 | 70.81 |
| Maharashtra      | 64.87   | 2    | 76.56 | 52.32  | 56.46 | 36.79 | 55.52 | 79.20 |
| Orissa           | 49.09   | 11   | 63.09 | 34.68  | 36.78 | 22.31 | 45.46 | 71.99 |
| Punjab           | 58.51   | 6    | 65.66 | 50.41  | 41.09 | --    | 52.77 | 72.08 |
| Rajasthan        | 38.55   | 15   | 54.99 | 20.44  | 26.29 | 19.44 | 30.37 | 65.33 |
| Tamil Nadu       | 62.66   | 4    | 73.75 | 51.35  | 46.74 | 27.89 | 54.59 | 77.99 |
| Uttar Pradesh    | 41.60   | 14   | 55.73 | 25.31  | 26.85 | 35.70 | 36.66 | 61.00 |
| West Bengal      | 57.70   | 7    | 67.81 | 46.56  | 42.21 | 27.78 | 50.50 | 75.27 |

Source: Census of India 1991

Note: Literacy is for age group 7 and above in 1991 Census

No Census was held in Jammu & Kashmir

(3) There are large inequalities in educational achievements between males and females, between urban and rural areas and between different social groups like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Female literacy is 39.29 against male literacy of 64.23, rural literacy is 44.54 against urban literacy of 73.01. SC & ST literacy rates are 37.4 and 29.60 respectively against the overall rate of 52.21. What is even worse is that the rural female literacy rate is only 19% among scheduled Castes and 16% among Scheduled Tribes and below 10% in the backward districts of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. In 1981 literacy rates of all rural Scheduled Caste women were even below 1% in several districts of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

(4) Even among young boys and girls particularly in rural areas illiteracy is widespread. For example, 1/2 of all rural females in 10-14 age group in India and almost 2/3rds in Uttar Pradesh are illiterate.

5) The proportion of rural females aged 12-14 who have never been enrolled in any school is above one half in India as a whole and above 2/3rds in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar and 82% in Rajasthan.

6) Only half of all children enrolled in class I are still at school 4 years later which shows the enormity of drop out rate.

(7) Low enrolment and retention rates imply that the proportion of persons who complete the primary cycle of 5 classes is extremely low. *In 1981 the proportion of Indian adults who had completed primary education was below 1/3rd. In the same year only one out of nine adult women in Uttar Pradesh had completed the primary cycle. In 1992-93 the proportion of females aged 6 and above who had completed primary education was 28.1% and males 48.6%. The average number of years of schooling for persons aged 25 and above is only 2.4 in India (1.2 for females and 3.5 for males), compared with 5.0 years in China, 7.2 years in Sri Lanka and 9.3 years in South Korea. (Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen: India Economic Development & Social Opportunity)*

(8) On top of the above deficiencies, the quality of education is abysmally poor. A study of student achievement in Madhya Pradesh found that about 70% of Grade IV students and 60% of Grade V students from schools in good urban areas had not mastered competency in Hindi and Mathematics that was to be expected for Grade II students and in a highly under-developed rural area of the State NOT ONE Grade IV or Grade V student had mastered the Grade II competency in regional language and mathematics. Even in a highly educationally advanced State like Kerala the learning achievement is poor.

(9) Yet another distressing feature of the educational scenario is the increase of absolute number of illiterates in India. The number which was 29.39 crores in 1951 has climbed up to 49.18 crores in 1991. At 49 crores, the number of illiterates is much larger than the total population of India of 36 crores in 1951! (Class Struggle: India To-day, October 13, 1997). ~~In the words of our~~

~~has said that the~~ <sup>observed</sup> ~~has~~ ~~characteristic~~ ~~that~~  
President Dr. K.R. Narayanan <sup>has</sup> ~~observed~~ that India has the "disgraceful distinction" of having the largest number of illiterates of any country in the world. (Mainstream, September 13, 1997)

### FUNDING OF EDUCATION

One important reason for the dismal performance is the inadequate funding of the elementary educational programme. Expenditure on elementary education which constituted 56% in the first Plan dipped to 24% during the Plan holiday period of 1966-69 and has slowly risen to 47% in the Eighth Plan. Nevertheless it is still less than what its share was in the First Plan. In 1992 the total public expenditure on the education sector as a whole was 3.8% of GNP. We are no where near reaching 6% of the GNP for the educational sector and providing not less than 50% for elementary education. In the last decade, however, there is a slow rising trend on expenditure earmarked for this sector. But what is most disconcerting is that some thing like 95% of expenditure on elementary education is spent on salary, leaving practically nothing for spending on other important dimensions of education like school buildings, play-grounds, furniture, library, laboratory, etc.

Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen have drawn attention to the distressing fact that with the rising salaries of teachers, *there is even a decline in the absolute number of teachers in primary and upper-primary schools between 1991-92 and 1992-93*. This underscores the necessity of increasing the total provision for education at 6% of GNP and enhancing the share earmarked for elementary education to not less than 50% of the total provision.

### UNEQUAL PROGRESS:

(1) Since independence some states have made remarkably good progress in the universalisation of education. The most spectacular progress made is that of Himachal Pradesh. Its percentage

of literacy in 1951 was only 7.71%, the lowest in the whole country, lower than that of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (Table 1). By 1991 it had achieved the third rank with a literacy rate of 63.86%, next only to Kerala and Maharashtra. It even exceeded though marginally the much appreciated literacy rate of 62.66% of Tamil Nadu. Jean Dreze has identified the following features of progress of education in Himachal Pradesh:-

- (i) The transition from mass illiteracy to near universalisation of primary education has taken place within a short period of 40 years compared to more than a century taken by Kerala.
- (ii) Educational progress in Himachal Pradesh has been based almost entirely on government schools, with relatively little contributions from private schools, missionary organisations, etc.
- (iii) Himachal Pradesh has an unfavourable topography (This has been considerably mitigated by the construction of border roads consequent on Chinese war). The study conducted by the Centre for Development Economics has identified high level of parental motivation and active state involvement and relatively low level of poverty as being responsible for the progress achieved. (Jean Dreze, Primary Priorities. Times of India, July 23, 1997.)

(2) A little noticed fact is the progress made by Maharashtra which was having the fourth rank with 20.9% literacy in 1951. It now occupies second rank with 64.87% among major states. This is all the more remarkable as Maharashtra got some very educationally backward districts from the former princely State of Hyderabad and as it is a very populous state. While Tamil Nadu's progress with 62.66% literacy in 1991 is much appreciated, the higher achievement of Maharashtra in spite of the odds noted is not highlighted.

(3) West Bengal in 1951 had the second rank in literacy, next only to Kerala but has now slipped to seventh rank below the States of Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Punjab. (Table 3). It is as surprising as it is unfortunate since the State under Leftist rule in the last few decades has made good progress in land reforms, a laudable social objective, triggering off equitable development. West Bengal is probably the only communist state in the world which has not given due attention to universalisation of education.

(4) Andhra Pradesh has now joined the ranks of the so called BIMARU states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh with its literacy rate of 44.09 which is lower than the literacy rate of Madhya Pradesh of 44.20! This is all the more pathetic as it is the fifth largest state with almost 8 per cent of India's population.

(5) The abysmal state of illiteracy in Uttar Pradesh is all the more deplorable considering that Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, V.P. Singh and Chandrasekhar, who were Prime Ministers of India for a total period of more than 40 years have hailed from this State! No better proof of the lack of political will and commitment to mass education on the part of the top leadership can be found.

#### **MAHBUB UL HAQ ON EDUCATIONAL SCENE IN SOUTH ASIA**

Mahbub ul Haq has characterised the educational scene in South Asia as the vast desert of illiteracy. He has pointed out that the South Asian literacy rate increased by 1.8% a year during 1960-1993 compared to 3.1% of Sub-Saharan Africa. Starting from an average adult literacy rate of 32% in 1970, South Asia reached a level of 48% by 1993. During the same period Sub-Saharan Africa had more than doubled its adult literacy level from 27% to 55%. This is all the more remarkable as many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa experienced ethnic strife and negative GDP growth for the last two decades. Unlike Sub-Saharan Africa, economic growth in South Asia has been reasonable and national resources have continued to expand. (Mahbub ul Haq, Human Development in South Asia 1997).

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## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF UNIVERSALISATION OF EDUCATION

### MULTIFARIOUS USES OF EDUCATION:

At the close of twentieth century, there is a much better understanding of the multifarious uses of universalisation of education. They are:

1. Education is an end in itself. It enables people to enrich their lives by providing access to literature, philosophy, science, technology, religion etc.
2. Empowerment of weaker sections like the poor/backward castes/rural folks /women/scheduled castes/scheduled tribes etc., is unthinkable without mass education. Greater literacy and educational attainments of disadvantaged groups can increase their ability to resist oppression, to organise themselves politically and to get a fair deal.
3. The benefits of educating women are: (i) It enhances the age of marriage of girls thereby eliminating child marriages. (ii) Marriage at the appropriate age contributes to the health of the mother and child (iii) It reduces maternal as well as infant mortality rates. (iv) It improves the health of women and thereby their life expectancy. (v) Demographers have identified female literacy combined with high labour participation rate as the most effective means of controlling the growth of population. It not only motivates women to limit their families but also equips them with the knowledge of using the methods of family planning efficiently. (vi) It can help to correct the imbalances in the proportion of men and women. It is a matter of great concern that there are only 40.34 crores of women in India as against 43.52 crores of males according to the 1991 Census. In other words, there are 3.38 crores fewer women than men. The empowerment of women through education is the most potent weapon for correcting this imbalance.
4. Education will help in preparing citizens to take part sensibly in the multi-lingual , multi-religious and multi-ethnic democratic and secular polity of India.



5. Compulsory Primary Education upto the age of 14 is a very effective means of getting rid of the scourge of child labour.

6. The benefits of education are not confined only to the person who receives education. For example, one person's educational ability can be of use to another (e.g., to get a pamphlet read, or to get a petition written). It is found that an illiterate farmer having his farm adjacent to a literate farmer can absorb technological developments better.

7. All levels of education give high rates of return both to the individual (private returns) and to society (social returns). However the rates of return to individuals are much higher in case of Primary Education than the rates of return in the cases of Secondary and University Education.

8. The two most important policy instruments available to induce productivity growth in agriculture are irrigation and primary education. Unfortunately even to-day there is lack of appreciation in India of the importance of education for reaping the benefits of technology advances in agriculture.

9. For a participatory and wide spread economic development basic education for a very substantial part of the labour force is a must. As Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen have pointed out "it may be much less glamorous to make simple pocket knives and reliable alarm clocks than to design state-of-the-art computer programmes but the former gives the Chinese poor a source of income that the latter does not provide--at least not directly--to the Indian poor".

#### **KERALA'S EXAMPLE:**

Kerala stands out as a beacon in the midst of the encircling gloom of India's illiteracy. Its total literacy rate is 89.81% as against India's 52.21%. *Its Female Literacy rate of 86.2% is higher than the male literacy rate of every other State of India.* No region even in China has a literacy

rate comparable to Kerala's. As a result, Kerala enjoys high human development in Life Expectancy, Family Planning, Reduction of Infant mortality, as shown below. (Table 4)

**TABLE:4**

**DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS**

| Region    | Adult Literacy Rate |        | Life Expectancy |        | Total Fertility Rate | Infant Mortality Rate |
|-----------|---------------------|--------|-----------------|--------|----------------------|-----------------------|
|           | Male                | Female | Male            | Female |                      |                       |
| India     | 64                  | 39     | 59              | 59     | 3.7                  | 80                    |
| Kerala    | 94                  | 86     | 69              | 74     | 1.8                  | 16                    |
| China     | 87                  | 68     | 68              | 71     | 2.0                  | 31                    |
| Sri Lanka | 94                  | 85     | 70              | 74     | 2.5                  | 18                    |
| S.Korea   | 99                  | 95     | 67              | 75     | 1.8                  | 13                    |

Source: Economic Development & Social Opportunity by Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen

It is remarkable that Kerala's voluntary family planning programme is more successful than China's One Child Compulsory Programme. This is so inspite of the fact that about 40% of the population of Kerala is Muslim and Catholic who are traditionally considered to be against family planning. The life expectancy of both men and women is higher in Kerala than in China and infant mortality rate is lower! Its human development is comparable to that of S. Korea, a country with several times the per capita income of Kerala. Sri Lanka, the only country with high literacy rate in South Asia, also enjoys a lead over China in human development in most areas, in spite of its long drawn out civil war.

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## CASTE SYSTEM AND ITS ADVERSE EFFECTS

The caste system which is unique to India has been and continues to be the biggest hurdle for the spread of education. The scheduled castes were prohibited from participating in the educational process right from the time of Manu. The credit for admitting scheduled castes to educational institutions goes to the Christian missionaries. They were the first to take this step by the late 18th and early 19th century. It was no doubt motivated by their desire for proselytization. East India Company also began admitting the Scheduled Castes into schools during the later period of its rule. There is the historical case of the teachers and students belonging to the higher castes threatening to boycott a school in Dharwad in Karnataka State in 1856 if Scheduled Castes students were admitted to the school. Ultimately, the Company decided to call the bluff of upper castes by admitting the scheduled castes students. Mention has already been made of the pioneering effort of Mahatma Phule in starting schools for them.

In spite of the support of eminent Indians like Swamy Dayananda Saraswathi, Mahatma Phule, Narayan Guru, Mahatma Gandhi, Ramaswamy Naicker, Chhatrapati Sahu Maharaj, Karmaveer Bhau Rao Patil and B.R. Ambedkar for the education of scheduled castes, there are hurdles faced by them even to this day in several states in gaining admission to schools and in getting equal facility to sit along with caste students as their equals. Primary schools are not usually set up in the Scheduled Caste villages and hamlets and obstacles are put in the way of Scheduled Castes children attending schools in rural areas.

People belonging to other backward castes, that is, shudras, were not expected to get education, though they were touchables. Because of their tradition of learning, Brahmins (of course males only to begin with) took to modern education with great alacrity. As a result they came to occupy most positions in government and in the professions. The backward castes particularly in the South and in Western Maharashtra agitated for reservations in higher education and in government service and secured them before independence. *It is pertinent to observe that it was only a small section of the backward castes which got educated and entered into government jobs and professions. Once this small section of the backward castes improved its position, it*

*stopped bothering about spread of elementary education among other members of its castes, who were numerous, poor and backward. It internalised the outlook of Brahmins of pursuing only intellectual development and looking down on development of manual skills. This may be considered as a species of Sanskritisation cum Westernisation restricted to miniscular sections of the Backward castes (now called the creamy layer) to ensure that the benefits are monopolised by the creamy layer. It fought and continues to fight for reservations only in courses like Engineering, Medicine, Business Management etc., and is supremely indifferent to the promotion of elementary education for the large sections of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward castes and women. Naturally, the impact of Backward castes movement in universalising elementary education has been very marginal.*

Amartya Sen makes the pertinent observation that the British in India took little interest in elementary education, but on the other hand were quite keen on creating institutions of higher learning in the good old Brahminical mode; but the same British in Buddhist Burma gave much more encouragement to the expansion of elementary teaching, even though they tended to do rather little for higher education. (Amartya Sen; Radical Needs and Moderate Reforms, Indian Development, OUP). This is corroborated by the excellent record of the British in spreading mass education in Sri Lanka, another Buddhist country.

#### **WOMEN'S EDUCATION LAGS FAR BEHIND:**

The other Achilles' heel of Indian society is the very low status accorded to all women irrespective of their caste/religion. In the early part of the 19th century some Hindus believed that a woman who gets education will soon become a widow. It is therefore no wonder that the education of women lags far behind. At the end of the 19th century female literacy rate was below 1% in every province of British India. The Indian tradition of not giving education to girls continues to have its sway even to-day. Three reasons may be noted for the continuing slow progress of womens' education. (1) The gender division of labour tends to reduce perceived

benefits of female education. It is felt that education for girls is not of much use, as they have to spend most of their adult life in domestic work and child rearing. This perception is however only partly true as education of women even within the family is highly beneficial for human development. (2) Leaving her paternal home and settling with the in-laws after marriage further undermines the importance of female education. Education of a girl is compared to watering a plant in another person's garden. (3) Practice of dowry which has these days spread to the lower castes turns female education into a liability, as an educated girl is expected to marry a more educated boy thereby forcing the parents to pay a higher dowry. However this argument will apply to a much greater extent in the case of girls with higher education than in the case of girls with only elementary education. (4) Paucity of women teachers in many rural schools is yet another hurdle in the education of girls as parents do not like their girls to be educated by men teachers. (5) Absence of separate toilets and the distance involved in reaching schools in a different village add to the problems of girl students. (6) The expectation that elder girls in the family should look after their siblings also comes in the way of expansion of female education.

The credit for being pioneers in the education of girls as in the case of scheduled castes goes to the Christian missionaries who set up schools for girls in late 18th century and early 19th century. Others who took special interest in education of girls and women were Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal, Jyothi Rao Phule, Pandita Rama Bai and D.K. Karve in Maharashtra.

It is clear that the caste-system has been one of the two major hurdles to the universalisation of education, the other being the inferior status of women in the Indian social system. Buddhist societies which are not built on caste basis and which also use people's language for religious purposes unlike Hindus and Muslims who believe in transacting religious rituals in God's languages of Sanskrit & Arabic respectively have shown great progress in mass education. Myanmar (Burma) with a per capita income lower than that of India has a literacy rate of 82.60%. Sri Lanka has achieved a literacy rate of 89%.

The Sub-Saharan African countries increased their literacy rate at 3.1% per annum during 1960-93 compared to 1.8% in South Asian countries. In the 50s and 60s these African countries were getting high school and college teachers from India. Many of the Sub-Saharan African countries suffered from ethnic conflicts and famines. The per capita income of many of these countries declined during this period unlike in the case of India.

In spite of these hurdles, the sub-Saharan African countries have shown a much higher increase in literacy! This accelerated progress of elementary education could take place in Sub-Saharan African countries probably because of the absence of caste system and on account of better position of women as demonstrated by a higher female-male ratio in sub-Saharan Africa compared to India/South Asia.

#### **CHILD LABOUR:**

It is argued that in a country where a large portion of population lives below the poverty line, the earning of children is very much needed since it can contribute to the family income and thereby mitigate the family's hardship. On this ground on which even well intentioned persons, including some social workers, oppose the introduction of compulsory education. It is necessary to examine this matter, though briefly.

It is true that a large number of children are working in not only agriculture, domestic sector but also in hazardous industries like glass-blowing, pottery making, match and crackers manufacturing. According to one estimate the number of working children in India is estimated to be 17 million. Employers prefer appointment of child labour and particularly female child labour, as it is cheap and also as children cannot unionise and resist malpractices of employers. Middle class families are happy to employ children as cheap domestic help.

Trade Union movement has not taken up cudgels against child labour as it is difficult to organise them and the return from their organisations are not considered worthwhile. However, it is

heartening to see that NGOs are now championing the cause of child labour and are trying to create public opinion for the total banning of children from all occupations and for making education compulsory upto the age of 14. The Supreme Court has also ruled against the employment of child labour in hazardous industries.

Fortunately public opinion is now building up in favour of banning child labour and making elementary education compulsory till the age of 14. There was a national public hearing on child labour in March 1997 by a jury consisting of eminent persons like Shri Muchkund Dubey, Former Foreign Secretary, Government of India, Shri N. Ram, Editor, Frontline, Shri T.S. Shankaran, Former Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Government of India, Justice Leila Seth, Retired Chief Justice, Himachal Pradesh High Court, Smt. Indira Jaising, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court. *et al.* The jury has recommended that no child should be made to work in any capacity as a labourer till the completion of 14 years of age and that free, compulsory, relevant and quality elementary education should be provided to all children and that State Laws be enacted for this purpose. Similarly, Citizens Initiative on Elementary Education in India in its publication "ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA - A CITIZENS' CHARTER", which was developed through a process of rigorous consultation among the citizens from all walks of life across the country, has stated "That child labour is as much an effect as a cause of the low participation of the poor children in the educational process, and must not be justified or rationalised. That free, compulsory education till 14 years of age, will positively reduce child labour". Likewise PRATHAM, Mumbai, an education initiative has also championed the cause of compulsory primary education. In a state like Kerala which certainly can not be counted among the economically advanced States, practically all children, boys as well as girls attend schools. Hence, there is no reason why child labour upto the age of 14 can not be totally prohibited in other states of India by the introduction of Compulsory Primary Education. This will, in fact, create employment for adults, as the jobs vacated by children have to be attended to by adults.

Countries even poorer than India have introduced Compulsory Primary Education which in effect implies a ban on employment of children. In case of needy parents, jobs can be provided under schemes like Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, DWACRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) etc., In case of handicapped parents and widowed mothers with no assets, special provision of family pension should be made so that children can go to school. Providing midday meals to children and giving long holidays for rural schools during agricultural seasons can also be of help in promoting elementary education among rural children.

#### BACKWARD CASTES,

#### RURAL AREAS, SCHEDULED CASTES AND TRIBES:

Another area of concern is the low percentage of literacy in rural areas. The caste-system has got attenuated to some extent in urban areas and as a result its adverse effects have become less serious than in villages. In villages the caste system is still deeply entrenched. Consequently, the motivation to send children belonging to backward castes continues to be weak. Added to this is the continuing prejudice, disdain and discrimination against scheduled castes which adversely affects their children's enrolment and continuation in school. Other reasons for poor performance in rural areas are lack of schools particularly in small villages and hamlets and the prevalence of single-teacher schools. In the case of single-teacher schools, invariably one teacher has to teach 4 classes; there is no supervision on his attendance and on his work at school. It is not unusual to find many such teachers remaining absent for days on end and even when they are present, they come late and leave early. In addition, school buildings are in a dilapidated condition and there is lack of infrastructure including furniture, black-boards, libraries, toilets, play-grounds, etc. In such a situation, parents find that there is no point in sending their children to schools.

It has already been noticed that literacy among scheduled tribes is the lowest among all sections in the country (Table 3). One reason for this backwardness is the remoteness of their habitations. Again, the cultural milieu of scheduled tribes is quite different and distinct. A study by Konda Reddy and Khammam Tribes in Andhra Pradesh has shown that many children of school age did not attend school, preferring instead spending their time moving freely around, swimming in ponds and streams, catching fish and climbing trees, hunting birds, collecting berries, riding on buffaloes,



etc. Compared to this free and joyous life, sitting in school room would be like imprisonment to these children, because of their different socialisation. In addition, as is well known, most of the scheduled tribes have their own dialects. Hence very special attention needs to be given to the education of scheduled tribes children (i) by establishing schools in their habitations, in spite of their tiny size, (ii) by using their mother-tongue and not the language of the state as the medium of instruction in the primary stage and (iii) by invariably appointing teachers belonging to the tribe. All this would constitute a special package for the scheduled tribe children. For this the State ought to make a special provision in educational planning. Also facilities provided to scheduled castes children have necessarily to be extended to the scheduled tribes.

#### IS PRIMARY EDUCATION FULLY FREE?

It is generally believed that primary education through out the country is free in schools run by government and local bodies like municipalities and zilla panchayats. This is not so in the true sense of the term in many parts of the country. In some states, tuition fee is exempted but fees are charged for library, sports, laboratory, etc. The true meaning of free education is that not only the student is not required to pay any type of fees to the school but also she is provided free of cost learning materials like slates, note-books, text-books and transport if the school is not within walking distance. A liberal meaning of free education will include the provision of school uniforms and mid-day meals. In some states free uniforms are provided to girl students. In a few states like Tamil Nadu cooked food is served to all children as mid-day meal. In some other states food-grains are given to the parents of children attending schools. Free education should not only be totally free of payment of all sorts of fees but should also make provision for free slates, note-books, text-books, transport where necessary and provide cooked food for lunch.

Uniforms should be given free to all students and to begin with at least to all girl students and to all scheduled castes and scheduled tribes boys and girls. It is also necessary to attach creches to primary schools so that children between the ages of 3 and 5 are provided with required facilities

thereby freeing the elder girl child from the task of taking care of her younger siblings and thus enabling her to attend the school.

### **STUDENTS, PARENTS & TEACHERS**

Students, parents and teachers are the key players on the educational stage. The performance of all the three of them contributes to the ultimate educational outcome. The various problems faced by different categories of students like girls, children in rural areas and children belonging to backward castes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have already been noted. However, in spite of these problems, there is a widespread and keen desire among these children for full time elementary education. Myron Weiner relates his observation about a class of 25 girls belonging to scheduled caste and backward caste families in a non-formal educational programme conducted by the Institute of Education near Pune. None of the girls had a schooling of more than 2 or 3 years before joining the non-formal classes. A few of the children worked for wages but most were at home and looked after their siblings, they fetched water and tended cattle and many of them prepared meals for the entire family, as their mothers were wage-earners. When asked whether they would have liked to complete their education in a regular school, all except two said yes. They had discontinued their schools at the instance of their mothers. When asked if they would educate their own daughters in regular school, they again said yes. When asked what they would do if they have to work and needed their elder daughters to take care of their younger children, one said she would send her baby to her mother-in-law and another added that she would send her baby to a creche. When asked who would take care of the cattle, a girl replied that they would bring the cattle together and engage somebody to look after them. All this shows their keenness regarding the full time education for their children. (Myron Weiner: Economic & Political Weekly, November 9-16, 1996).

It is generally believed among the upper and middle classes that illiterate parents do not value education. Contrary to this belief, a survey conducted by PROBE (planned by a

group of researchers at the Delhi School of Economics and the Indian Social Institute) revealed that a resounding 98% stressed that it was important for sons to go to schools and 89.9% felt the same about daughters.

Another interesting outcome of the survey was that it is not always work that keeps children away from school. The survey found that the majority of out of school children in rural India have plenty of time on their hands (Primary Education Class Struggle; INDIA TODAY, October 11, 1997). However it can not be denied that some parents believed that education does not succeed in getting jobs for a large number of educated persons. They take a very short sighted view of education and ignore its multifarious uses, including a value of education for better self-employment. This is particularly true of illiterate parents. They have to be convinced about the benefits of education.

The performance of teachers is the most worrying problem. The poor performance of teachers in primary schools is the main cause for high drop out and low retention rates. The causes for the poor performance of teachers are: (1) Deficiencies in pre-training and in-service training. (2) Poor working conditions - schools which lack class-rooms, chairs, benches, black-boards, toilet facilities, safe drinking water, electricity, etc. The PROBE survey, already referred to, found that only 37% of the school buildings had non-leaking roofs, only 48% had play-grounds, 42% had safe drinking water facilities, 73% had black-boards and only 11% had functioning toilets. (3) Another serious problem faced by primary schools is the multigrade teaching where a single teacher is required to teach several grades. (4) Most teachers perceive their status in society as low. They feel that their salary scales are low and prospects for career advancement and promotion are very limited. (5) There is difficulty in housing, particularly for women teachers. While most of the grievances of teachers are legitimate and action needs to be taken on them, it may not be possible to enhance substantially their pay-scales, as they belong to the top decile of the income scale in rural India, except for mitigating hardship caused by continuing inflation.

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### **NFEs, NGOs, PRIs & THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

Non-formal (NFE) education is proposed as an alternative to the formal system of education and is generally targetted at working children. Learning at the non-formal education centres, in theory is expected to be comparable to that in formal education and classes are held at times convenient for the working children. A major objective of the non-formal education system is to enable the drop-outs to join the mainstream of education. NFE depends heavily on the NGOs and the local community in achieving its objectives. Evaluation studies on non-formal education programmes show that they have several weaknesses. The PROBE survey of schooling facilities in the Hindi speaking states found fewer than 10 functional NFE centres in 188 survey villages. However, there are exceptions to this rule. EKALAVYA, an NGO in Madhya Pradesh has done outstanding work in developing an integrated primary school package -- Khushi-Khushi. PRATHAM MUMBAI EDUCATION INITIATIVE, a public charitable trust is doing admirable work in the Corporation area of Mumbai by undertaking the promotion of elementary education. It is running 2500 Balwadis with 60000 children and runs special community programmes for the benefit of four lakh children in municipal schools. It is also championing vigorously the amendment to the Constitution to make the right to education fundamental. Barring such competent and dedicated NGOs, the role to be performed by other NGOs should be limited to (i) creating awareness of the importance of elementary education among parents and among members of panchayats, (ii) in seeing that all children enrol in primary schools, (iii) in ensuring that the enrolled children attend classes regularly and (iv) in taking care to see that there are no drop outs till they complete 8 years of schooling. The NGOs will ensure the fulfilment of these objectives by net-working with parents and teachers. NFE centres will have to be organised only by competent NGOs or by the education department itself. The role of non-formal education is to be limited strictly to the transitional period of about a decade after the introduction of free and compulsory primary education.

In a country as vast as India, there has to be a decentralised system of education suited to the needs of different regions and sub-regions. Hence, the local community and the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) should be fully involved in the educational process:-

- (1) Local communities and PRIs must be free to decide the location, type and scale of building to be constructed with funds provided by the State Government and supplemented by PRIs along with additional resources to be mobilised by the community.
- (2) Local communities and PRIs should have authority to decide on fixing school hours and vacations in the light of the local conditions. In most rural areas the harvest season should coincide with the long vacation.
- (3) Local communities and NGOs should be given role in monitoring the attendance and scholastic performance of the teachers as the local communities are the stake holders in the education of their children.
- (4) If there are vacancies of teachers in a school and the state is unable to fill them in reasonable time, the community and the PRIs should have the freedom to appoint teachers locally. In the long run, the PRIs like Zilla Panchayats and Taluk Panchayats should be empowered to run the schools, appoint teachers and ensure that they perform their duties satisfactorily.
- (5) The community in turn must look after the maintenance of the school buildings, augment teaching and learning aids, supplement school feeding programme and also honour the good work done by the teachers so that harmonious relations are built up between the local community and the teachers.
- (6) Every school should have a betterment committee with representation for teachers, parents and members of PRIs to ensure the optimal-functioning of the school.

## CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

It has already been noted that the right to education is only a Directive Principle of State Policy and not a Fundamental Right. As it is not a fundamental right, it remains virtually a dead letter. Prof. K.T. Shah had, as noted already, anticipated this development and had called the Directive Principle of State Policy on free and compulsory education a fraud on the Constitution.

Now the situation seems to have changed a little for the better with the ruling of the Supreme Court in the case of Unnikrishnan J.P. vs. Andhra Pradesh that the right to elementary education upto the age of 14 years is a fundamental right. However, the probability that this ruling may in future be reviewed and reversed by the Supreme Court can not be ruled out. Hence, there is a need to pass a constitutional amendment making the right to education a fundamental right and a duty of parents to send their children to school. This will enable the aggrieved citizens to approach the court, if the State fails to provide schooling facilities of reasonable quality at suitable locations. With this end in view, the previous United Front Government had introduced the Constitution (Eighty-third Amendment) Bill 1997. The main provision in the proposed amendment is that the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age 6 to 14 years.

Now that there is a change of Government, one has to refer to BJP's National Agenda for governance to find out its stand on the subject. The agenda states: "We are committed to a total eradication of illiteracy. We will formulate and implement plans to gradually increase the governmental and non-governmental spending on education upto 6% of the GDP; this to provide education for all. We will implement the constitutional provision of making primary education free and compulsory upto 5th standard. Our aim is to move towards equal access to and opportunity of educational standards upto the school leaving stage. We shall strive to improve the quality of education at all levels -- from primary schools to our universities.....We will also institute Plans for providing free education for girls upto college level, including professional courses, so as to better empower women.....We will present a National Charter for

children. Our aim is to ensure that no child remains illiterate. We will take measures to eliminate child labour”.

It will be seen from the National Agenda that there is no specific mention of amending the Constitution for providing schooling upto the age of 14 years, that is, of 8 years duration. On the other hand, the National Agenda talks of making primary education free and compulsory upto 5th standard only which is lower than what is contemplated in the Directive Principles of State Policy. Of course, there is a vague statement that the aim is to move towards equal access and opportunity of educational standards upto the school leaving stage. This is neither here nor there, as no time frame is mentioned even for providing free and compulsory primary education upto 5th standard!

#### **INDIA CAN FINANCE COMPULSORY PRIMARY EDUCATION**

The reason for down-scaling of schooling from 8 years to 5 years seems to be on account of difficulty of mobilising the required finances for launching the programme. The financial memorandum attached to the constitutional amendment had estimated the additional cost of implementing the programme at Rs.40,000 crores in a period of 5 years, at the rate of Rs.8,000 crores per year. Opinions were expressed in the media that this was an under-estimate. It is not possible to explain in detail the means of mobilising the finances required for the programme. Suffice it to note that the Government spends something like Rs.15,000 crores on subsidies to the middle classes. If a portion of these subsidies are diverted to elementary education, the additional costs of universalisation of education are met. Eminent economists are also in agreement with the view that, if there is a will, it is within India's financial means to launch compulsory primary education. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen have opined: “There is no question that, even in a country as poor as India, means can be found to ensure universal attainment of literacy and other basic educational achievements, at least in the younger age group”. (Jean Dreze & Amartya Sen; India - Economic Development and Social Opportunity - Page 139).

This view is corroborated by Mahbub ul Haq, the Pakistani economist, who is internationally acclaimed for his crusade for Human Development. Haq has observed: "Overall, South Asia is spending 3.5% of its GNP on education, compared to 4.3% in East Asia, 5.5% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 5% in the Arab States. The bias in South Asian region in favour of colleges and universities greatly squeezes the financial budgets for basic education. In 1994, primary education received only 47% of the total budgetary allocation in South Asia, compared to 70% in East Asia during their initial phase of development". (Mahbub ul Haq - Human Development in South Asia - 1998 - Seminar April 1998).

In our own country states like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have demonstrated that universalisation of elementary education is within the financial capability of India. The experience of Sub-Saharan African countries which are spending a greater share of the GDP on elementary education and have overtaken India in terms of literacy also supports the conclusion that India can also finance the universalisation of elementary education, if only there is a political will. An interesting suggestion is made by Mahbub ul Haq. He proposes "a constitutional provision that funds for attaining the goal of universalisation of primary education will be treated as the *'first claim'* on budgetary resources. Ideally, the Parliament should pass a Bill that at least 5% of the GNP will be earmarked for education and then it should ensure each year that such a provision is protected from erosion, despite the inevitable budget crisis from time to time".

### **WHAT IS COMPULSION?**

While championing the constitutional amendment on the subject, some Indians are arguing that there should only be a compulsion on the state to provide free and quality education on an adequate scale to create conditions for universal schooling but that there should not be compulsion on the parents to send their children to school as it will lead to their harassment.. However, there is a case for introducing compulsion on parents to send their children to school, as they may not do so under the following circumstances:- First of all parents are likely to ignore the education of their daughters as the benefits of educating daughters go to another family.



Secondly, an irresponsible father may like to spend money on liquor by using the earnings of his children. Thirdly, inhuman social arrangements like bonded labour are likely to be eliminated only on the introduction of compulsory education. Fourthly, one parent's decision to send a child particularly a female child to school may persuade another parent to follow suit. (Jean Dreze, Primary Priorities, Times of India, October 15, 1997). To reduce the likely harassment to the poor parents, NGOs and panchayats should try all persuasive methods to induce recalcitrant parents to send their children to school. When all persuasive methods fail, recourse to punitive methods has to be taken. Even that apostle of individual liberty, John Stuart Mill wrote that the state shall compel the education of "every human being who is born its citizen" and that it "ought not leave the choice to accept or not to accept education in the hands of parents".

India had a head start in the championing of mass education by leaders like Jyotirao Phule, Dadabhai Navroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mahatma Gandhi. It has paid dearly for its failure to achieve universalisation of elementary education in lost opportunities of human development, population control, empowerment of women and in achieving widespread and equitable economic development. At least let us now pass the Constitutional Amendment so as to fulfil the dream of Gopal Krishna Gokhale who said on the defeat of his Bill on Compulsory Primary Education: "This Bill thrown out to-day will come back again and again till on the stepping stones of its dead selves, a measure ultimately rises which will spread the light of knowledge throughout the land."