

Conference of State Education Secretaries and Directors
of Education / Adult Education

AGENDA NOTE

FROM NAEP TO NLM

While there has been a programme of Adult Education since India's independence, a major initiative was taken in 1978 with the introduction of the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP). The programme was based on the establishment of adult education centres in villages and urban slums where learning was imparted in groups. The programme created a base for adult education, but given the magnitude of the problem of illiteracy, its intensity and spread was limited.

The programme continued to be 'centre' based and honorarium-based till recently. An assessment of the 'centre' based programme shows that the results have not been commensurate with the efforts and the investments. The project management and instructors were more interested in running the project and the adult education centres rather than eradicating illiteracy. Although satisfactory teaching-learning materials were made available, the system of training and learner evaluation was far from satisfactory. The monitoring system generated information about the number of centres run and the persons enrolled, but little about the persons actually made literate or the levels of literacy achieved. There were reports that there had been only

marginal improvement in literacy rates even in compact areas where the project had run for many years. It is therefore, not surprising that the Adult Education programme had begun to be viewed with dismay and cynicism by people from all walks of life.

The breakthrough came with the launch of the National Literacy Mission (NLM) in 1988 with the time bound objective of imparting functional literacy to 80 million persons in the 15 - 35 age group by 1995. The creation of a Mission for literacy represented political commitment at all levels reflecting a national consensus on the need to harness all social forces and channelise the energies of the people towards meeting the ultimate objective of effecting a qualitative change in their own lives.

The single most spectacular achievement since the launch of NLM is the positive value association that literacy is beginning to receive. From a climate of apathy and cynicism to a feeling of hope and optimism that change is possible and achievable, has been a long journey for literacy workers.

MASS MOBILISATION

This feeling of hope and optimism has been created mainly because of the leadership provided by persons like Prof. Ramlal Parikh, Dr Malcolm Adisheshiah, Dr M.P. Parameshwaran and Shri Prem Bhai. The years 1989 and 1990 saw intensive activities for organisation of mass mobilisation drive for literacy through jathas.

Spearheaded by Shri Prembhai, a large number of Gandhian and Sarvodaya voluntary agencies and youth activists adopted the 'walk and talk' strategy to reach the message of literacy to 350 blocks in 43 districts in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh. Simultaneously, the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti consisting of activists of 26 voluntary organisations of the Peoples' Science Movement launched a country-wide jatha to reach 31,000 villages in 332 districts. The BGVS sought to spread the message of literacy, especially womens' literacy, along with messages for national integration, small family, environment conservation.

These efforts at direct contact and mobilisation coupled with the support of the press and the electronic media, timed with the International Literacy Year, succeeded in conveying the essential message, namely that education and literacy matter ___ and that education and literacy are decisive in shaping our future and society.

TOTAL LITERACY CAMPAIGNS

The strategy for Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) has evolved not through any bureaucratic decision, but on the basis of sound precedents. The year 1989 saw the launching of a number of experimental programmes, among them the mobilisation of Voluntary Agencies, University, College and school teachers and students through the

Gujarath Vidyapeeth, Students/NSS mobilisation through Kottayam University, the 20-block mass literacy campaign in Karnataka, and the Ernakulam Literacy campaign. The Ernakulam campaign was marked by a close collaboration of the district administration with volunteer groups spearheaded by the Kerala Shashtra Sahitya Parishad. In the Ernakulam campaign an environment was created in a manner that it impelled people from all walks of life - religious groups, political parties, and people from diverse occupations - to come forward and take responsibility for eradication of illiteracy within a defined time-frame.

The lessons learned from these programmes were incorporated in the Total Literacy Campaigns launched in the remaining 13 districts of Kerala, Dakshina Kannada and Bijapur in Karnataka, Chittoor and Nellore in Andhra Pradesh, Midnapur and Burdwan in West Bengal, and Pondicherry.

PRESENT POSITION OF TLCs

These efforts have had a snowballing effect. As of March 1992 there were 88 Total literacy Campaigns covering 139 districts in the country. In addition, 43 Voluntary Agencies have also come forward to implement TLCs in certain blocks. A statement indicating the areas in which these campaigns have been launched is at Annexure I.

There have been several important and interesting fallouts of the TLC experiment during the last 2 years

or so. The TLC has brought cross-sections of the society professing different ideologies, faiths and beliefs together to sink their differences and pledge their solidarity and support for the campaign. A confluence of creative forces and energies has been created. Thousands of songs, slogans, skits, role plays and simulation exercises have opened up new outlets in creativity. The TLC has demonstrated that learners can learn despite age and disability, despite caste, class and gender divide and despite physical and environmental constraints. As they learn, they are becoming acutely conscious of the need for children's enrolment and retention in schools, the need for health, hygiene, environmental sanitation, maternity protection, immunisation, DRT and a host of child-care messages. Women learners are becoming more vocal, more articulate and more assertive. Their self-image and self-confidence are getting boosted beyond measure. TLC has promoted social and emotional integration and communal harmony; it has helped to promote rational, secular and scientific temper in place of fads and taboos and obscurantist ideas, beliefs and practices. TLC has brought administration and people closer together; it has opened up new frontiers of communication.

While these combined efforts have made it possible for the country to systematically adopt the Campaigns approach to eradication of illiteracy and give it a

centrality, the spread of the TLCs is not even. It is significant that the States with the lowest literacy rates and the largest populations - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan - are the States where the TLC has not struck deep roots as yet. Moreover, of the 32 States and Union Territories in the country, only 17 States/UTs have ongoing literacy campaigns in selected districts or blocks. Even in these 17 States and Union Territories the spread is uneven. While Kerala and Pondicherry literacy campaigns had State-wide coverage, and States such as Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal have involved substantially large number of districts, the Campaigns in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Haryana are restricted to one or two districts only.

POSITION IN THE EDUCATIONALLY BACKWARD STATES

Even in the educationally backward States of Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, there is enthusiasm at the village level for this programme which can capitalise on a minimal environment building effort. The learners do come forward to learn in large numbers in the areas where the project has been initiated as a people's movement. Moreover, the experience of the akshar sena jathas have resulted in the mobilisation of a large number of volunteers.

However, the administrative support remains weak or inadequate. A major problem is posed by the preoccupation of district collectors with law and order administration, controlling communally sensitive events, extremist violence and sometimes management of natural calamities. Frequent transfers add to the instability of the situation, and added to this is the generally limited experience the administration working as partners with NGOs, and of participating in people's movements.

The people's support structure is weak. The sincere, committed, and dedicated individuals who volunteer to work for literacy by and large have little managerial experience. A much higher level of training for committed individuals and more intense efforts in identifying capable and positive minded persons are essential for finding a solution to this problem.

Many of the northern states and the educationally backward states, therefore, present a paradox - on one hand, there is a strong need for literacy and on the other inadequate and ineffective delivery mechanisms for literacy, and insufficient prioritisation of literacy as a social value. It has, therefore, become imperative to make another major attempt to build up an environment for literacy campaigns. Two years have elapsed since the last effort at environment building and a renewed mobilisation campaign is necessary to sustain the momentum of the TLCs.

BHARAT GYAN VIGYAN JATHA - II

The Bharat Gyan Vigyan Jatha - II which has been conceptualised in this perspective has the following objectives:

1. To interlink symbiotically the literacy efforts in the country, both governmental and non-governmental, big and small and create among them a feeling of being partners in one and the same national mission.
2. To instil enthusiasm and excitement in the field activists for motivation of learners and volunteers.
3. To develop an informal arrangement for rapid information transfer and mutual reinforcement among literacy workers at all levels.
4. To reach out to every village in 250 districts with a call to stamp out illiteracy.
5. To communicate to the widest possible audience the centrality of functional literacy and scientific awareness.
6. To create a demand for literacy campaigns in all these districts.
7. To nucleate, motivate and inspire new local level groups, voluntary organizations and individuals to take up the task of eradication of illiteracy and creation of scientific awareness amongst the people, thereby creating a people's network to support and sustain total literacy campaigns.