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Primary education

The introduction of universal primary education will strike at the roots of one of the basic scourges of underdevelopment, namely illiteracy. It will be fitting if the government takes up such a programme during the Second Five-Year Plan period. This is a gigantic undertaking and the government will have to tread a cautious path delineating the major aspects of the programme at the beginning.

The principal obstacles to universal primary education are the absence of an organisational structure and the lack of finance to maintain such a structure adequately. Normally we should have school buildings in every nook and cranny of the country, preferably one in every village, with a satisfied staff of teachers and sufficient books, blackboards and necessary educational aids. In our scheme of things we cannot have all of these at the outset. What we must aim at is the coverage of as large a population of the country as possible with minimum but attractive enough facilities and then continually expand the frontiers of the programme. The National Education Advisory Council in its interim report earlier in January came out with a proposal of how to meet the cost of school buildings and other very essential teaching aids. It suggested a community approach to arranging necessary building material, that is the people would contribute to the cost of such buildings in their own locality. Secondly, the NEAC pointed out that these school houses could be made from the locally available material, such as bamboo, timber, ropes, etc. The labour necessary for construction can also be provided by the local people whose children will use the schools. The government can come forward with a token contribution after local efforts have already completed the necessary construction. The advantage of arranging school facilities on a self-help basis is that the people will have a greater sense of belongingness to these institutions and will feel inclined to safeguarding their interests.

High among the priorities in primary education programme is also the consideration of attractive service conditions for the school teachers and their training facilities. Primary education will necessarily have to be taken on a massive scale, but this does not mean that there would be any let down in quality of education. Quality depends, however, among other things on the quality of teachers and this is one aspect of the problem of primary education which deserves attention.