

# Some Thoughts On Universal Primary Education

—Dr. Md. Hafizuddin Shaikh—

**UNIVERSAL** primary education has a survival value for Bangladesh. Without this, the nation will be heading toward a serious food shortage for her 80 million people with 2.8 per cent yearly population growth rate in a land of only 55 thousand square miles. The economy of Bangladesh is agriculture based and will remain so in future. However now we are importing 1.5 million tons of food-grains per year. We imported 2.5 million tons of food-grains some years back. The decrease in the import rate has been made possible by the introduction of scientific cultivation.

It is estimated that only 15 per cent of the cultivable land in Bangladesh is cultivated scientifically. It also is estimated that a 25 per cent increase in the input expenditure will result in 100 per cent increase in the output. The people who own the land have not enough labour of their own. Tradition bound they are reluctant to invest more money for the fear of natural calamities. They can earn their livelihood by cultivating portion of their land in a scientific way keeping the major part under traditional cultivation, even though about 50 per cent of our rural population do not have more than one-third of an acre for cultivation.

Bangladesh has enough cultivable land and necessary labour potential to produce sufficient food for her 80 million people. But the land is so long under-utilized and her manpower potential has not been utilized for want of an appropriate educational system.

Perhaps it is time for central government to empower local government agencies to under take universal primary education as their main Programme. To make education free in every respect, each village will raise money through local taxes. The main source of tax will be the landed property. The landowners either will pay the tax or make a portion of their land available for village co-operative cultivation. Under this arrangement the co-operatives would pay the taxes as well as a reasonable rental to the landowners for the use of their lands. We should make village-life attractive in the matter of better livelihood. Village co-operatives would receive technical help and loans from the Government to manage their farms so as to produce the most. A major share of the profits will revert to the school in the form of taxes. Under efficient management, the co-operatives may provide for training and for employing student labour. The co-operatives should be so

we educate our children to send them to cities and towns for better job prospects.

A most important step is literacy to realize the human resource potential in order to improve our agro-based economy. Planners, teachers, and parents must so arrange that literacy skills enable the farmers to grow more food. Literacy also enables them efficiently and profitably to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to improve their lives.

Adult education is a separate venture may not survive. Qualitatively and quantitatively primary education needs the vigilant attention of the parents. Parents through the adult education programme must understand that they are indispensable in their children's education up to class II, if not beyond. They must be literate for the sake of their children's education, if not for their own sake. Parents must understand that it is possible for them to learn some reading and writing within a fortnight. As a result, they will be able to continue their own self-education and to start teaching the same techniques to their youngsters.

**PARENTS' EDUCATION:** Parents should understand that ninety per cent of our children spend three or more years before being promoted to class III mainly because of their irregular attendance. The preparatory work should be completed within two years by cooperating with the teachers in an integrated approach.

Parents should realize that mere memorization of facts is not education. Education must be reflected in the behaviour and in the use of skills and knowledge which grow through practice. Parents are to co-operate in the development of the proper environment necessary for the nurturing of the creative potential of their children. In the process of educating their children, mothers can be taught good nursery rhymes which they may recite to their children for their enjoyment.

Many words and sentences need to be memorised in rhyme patterns, which children enjoy reciting with their mothers. Instead of laughing at or stopping creative activities of the children mothers should be helping their children to do them.

**NUMBER BEFORE ALPHABET:** Adults can become functional literates quickly if taught the numerals first. Numerals are only ten in number while the Bengali Alphabet contains 30 letters. The farmer of necessity must record the date of collecting the harvest of seeds. At least, ten per cent of the efficiency

accurate time of sowing different varieties of vegetables. The need for correct dates can be recognized by the farmers through guided discussions of their experiences. After the discussion, they can be shown the easy way of writing the dates such as 28.2.79 which means 28th February 1979. Gradually they can be taught how to use a calendar. They also would be able to keep their small accounts.

Each of the ten numerals in Bengali can be written with two letters. If we write the numerals as well using them in writing words, and teach illiterate adults how to read them, they will be able to recognize Bengali letters. This is possible because of the special advantage of Bengali orthography (to be explained orally) at each numeral is made to form in parts the number it represents such as

১ ২ ৩ ৪ ৫ ৬

the numeral can be identified easily by the illiterate because he can count its parts. Thus the numeral works as a picture as well.

All the numerals are easier to write than the letters of the alphabet. All ten numerals can be written large so that adults can trace them with their fingers. The illiterate adult thus will be able to recognize and to understand the numerals and gradually the number concept and its writing system, and how to write different letters by starting with different numerals such as

১ ম গ প ১

২ ব ঙ ঘ ঙ

৩ হ ই

৪ উ ঊ

৫ এ ঐ

৬ ও ঔ

৭ ঋ ঌ

৮ ঐ ঐ

৯ ঐ ঐ

১০ ঐ ঐ

১১ ঐ ঐ

১২ ঐ ঐ

১৩ ঐ ঐ

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cation Project indicates that using the model of para-medical staff, intelligent and sincere local women having been educated for six to ten years can be trained to teach Class I effectively in a feeder school. In a number of cases, the quality of their teaching is superior to that of a trained Matriculate or a trained graduate. To ensure such quality in-service training programme is necessary.

Mothers' club needs to be organized in each village to make them conscious and skillful in parent-teacher co-operation, in increasing enrollments and improving the quality of the education of their children. Women will acquire the necessary knowledge and develop skills and proper attitudes through programmes of adult education.

**FATHERS' EDUCATION:** Intelligent but illiterate fathers can help in the implementation of a curriculum designed to meet the needs of our agro-based society.

Experienced farmers, fishermen etc., experienced in their vocations are in a much better position than are the teachers to understand the contents of an agricultural curriculum. The authors of text books on environment write about agricultural topics without experience in the field. Teachers without practical experiences are teaching from these texts. Students are memorizing them without any practical experience. This traditional method of teaching-learning must be replaced by integrating primary education with adult education.

Fathers of pupils in Classes IV and V will be organized to co-operate with teachers in the development of suitable vocational skills for their own children. Reading materials containing information relevant to the occupation or life of the father will be collected or prepared and supplied to the child who having read them will discuss them with the father and others in the light of their own experiences.

**PRIMARY FOR ADULTS:** Fathers and mothers should have separate primers with appropriate contents to meet their respective needs. Quotations from the Holy Scriptures, sayings of great men and short rhymed proverbs signifying positive life values will be recited to the adults who will interpret them in the light of their own experiences. Proper meanings of those will be developed so as to motivate parents in taking their respective roles in the process of parent-teacher co-operation. These also will be included as content of the primers for adults. The mother or father of a family will

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