PRIMARY EDUCATION IN WEST BENGALE
Elementary or Primary Education in India covers a long history of several thousand years. In the said chronological framework, origin and development of Primary Education may be studied in historical perspective, comprising three periods, viz. ancient, mediaeval and modern. In terms of relevance the modern period is important, compared to two other periods. Accordingly, involvement has been made with the same phase.

In ancient India, there was the presence of Gurukul system. After the completion of study at home, the students after necessary rituals were sent to Gurukul, i.e. the house of the preceptor. The system was strictly limited to three upper castes of the Hindu society (Altekar, 1936). This gradually led to the development of a glorious heritage which initially remained confined to a section of Sanskrit based scholars. This comprises a process of a life-long learning with a minimum period of twelve years. It was not merely elementary learning but the pursuit of knowledge to its highest level. It was during the Buddhist period that the scope for learning was made open to all and a mass approach of democratic nature developed towards education. The popular language Pali, instead of Sanskrit, became the medium of instruction and thereby the initiation of elementary mass education became possible. This gave rise to the origin and development of an indigenous system of Primary Education for the common people, organised and conducted not only by the religious authorities but also by larger community, covering different hierarchical levels. This process in furtherance accounts for the origin of the pathshalas as the institutions for imparting
elementary education to the mass which was followed by a higher education conducted through chatuspathis and tols (Keay, 1938). From historical data it is found that Elementary or Primary Education followed a curriculum which imparted not only elementary knowledge in the 3 R's but also provided a learner with a kind of practical and vocational preparation for life. This tradition of the indigenous Primary Education is found to have continued through the mediaeval period of history inspite of various socio-economic and political changes.

HISTORICAL CONTINUITY

In rough estimation mediaeval period in Indian history started with the establishment of Muslim rule in India. This political rule, with dominance on Islamic religion, continued for more than 600 years when a new religion and culture entered into the Indian scenario and through time made far-fetched effects. Along with the political rule, the religious and cultural influences of the new ruling-class started percolating through Indian life. This witnessed a period of initial conflicts even of violent nature but gradually it subsided. There was a process of transformation with socio-cultural synthesis in which education played a distinctive role. During this period the new system of Islamic education originated and developed along with traditional indigenous system of education. Muslim education, based on the principles of the Islam, from the very beginning was much concerned with Primary Education for the commoners. This puts forward the explanation for the origin of the maktabs, the primary centres of learning, followed by the madrasahs, the higher centres of Muslim learning. All such institu-
tions were conducted by the religious centres, the mosques. Fundamental knowledge of religion, basic learning skills with a vocational bias constituted the curriculum. In course of time, these two parallel systems came in mutual contact and gave rise to great cultural and educational significance.

Later British rule in India initiated a relatively modern system of education. Prior to this education system in India was more traditional and thereby the universal character was not present in fullfledged form. In addition, the organization in indigenous education system was not absolutely full proof. During the long Muslim rule in medieval India, there was an indigenous system of education. Along with the Muslim system of education the Hindu education also prevailed, satisfying the elementary needs of learning of the people with their natural limitations (Bhattacharyya, 1956). During the early years of British rule in India, this indigenous system of elementary education continued to exist, but had been fighting hard for its survival due to lack of official patronage and adequate local support. This is evident from various reports prepared by a number of English personalities like Munro (1822) on Madras, Elphinstone (1824) on Bombay and Adams (1835-38) on Bengal. Further works were carried out based on their investigations. Their findings point out that indigenous elementary education suffered from many inadequacies but even then they deserved the credit for imparting instructions to the mass.

Within no time the Christian Missionaries from the West availed themselves of the opportunity to take up the task of setting up elementary schools for the illiterate 'natives', probably with the
ultimate goal of spreading religion, the Christianity, among them. This virtually marked the beginning of a new system of Elementary education in India which gradually extended far and wide all over the colony. After 1813, the English East India Company, the then ruling authority of British India, started taking interest in the field of education under the instruction of Charter Act of 1813.

In this regard, the 43rd Section in the Charter, the appropriate part on the same has been quoted here:

"It shall be lawful for the Governor General in Council to direct ... out of any surplus which may remain of the rents, revenues, and profits ... a sum of not less than one lac of rupees in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literature ... and for the promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India" (Nurullah and Naik, 1971: 48).

Such law and the implementation of the same gave rise to support the cause for education in a formal way. The initiation of this nature was also appreciated by the local people. Thereby spread of education, perhaps, paved the way for better administration. This was followed by a period of educational controversies (Trevelyan, 1838) ultimately ending up with the Bentinck's declaration of the first official policy on education, namely the introduction of a western system of education through English, in India.

An abstract on Macaulay's Minutes and resolutions made by Bentinck are apt to include those. The Wood's Despatch of 1854 may be held responsible for developing the organisational and adminis-
trative structure of a colonial system of education out of which the modern well demarcated stages of Primary, Secondary and Higher education did evolve in India.

Under Bentinck's instruction Macaulay prepared the famous Minute on Education which advocated for the adoption of an official policy for introducing western system of education through English in India in 1835 A.D. In rejecting outright the claim in favour of classical or indigenous system, the Minute remarked:

"It may safely be said that the literature now in that language (English) is of greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together" (Nurullah and Naik, 1971).

Bentinck gleefully approved of the Minute and made declaration of the first official policy on Indian education in 1835 in categorical terms which has been quoted here: "The great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India, and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone".

In the meantime, the indigenous education has been totally negated by the Government. Simultaneously, the local people were losing interest in the indigenous form of education, probably due to dominating impact of English education system. As a result, the former system had its natural death. In course of the transformation, the Missionary enterprise at the Primary level of education faced a serious opposition from the Indian people due to its religious overtone. Finally, the Company authorities were pressurised to initiate an official system of Primary Education.
The Government was influenced more by political and economic considerations than by academic propriety in adopting a firm policy in favour of English education and language. Introduction of mass education was not the policy. The problem which the creators of the modern system of education had to face was to decide, at the very outset, whether they should educate a class or a number of classes or the mass as a whole. A view that came to be put forward very early on this subject was that Government should educate only those classes of society that had lost most by the change of Government. This is of course a nascent idea.

This view was replaced by another which is popularly known as the 'Downward Filtration Theory' ... in which the upper or influential classes of society were proposed to be educated ... their culture would later on naturally descend to the lower classes (Nurullah and Naik, 1971). Thus they adopted the policy of "downward filtration theory" wherein education would be spread at the top or the upper strata of society which would gradually percolate down, although it was observed that it did not reach down as it should have. Government money was scarcely spent for Primary Education. This created a popular urge to begin with and then through local and private enterprises the task of spreading and disseminating Primary Education was continued.

A provision in the East India Charter Act of 1813, to empower the Governor General of India to spend one lakh of rupees (INR 100,000.00) each year for the purpose of education. This was the first legislative admission of the right of education to have
access to the public revenues of India and the Education Despatch of 1854 issued by the Court of Director of the East India Company (re-affirmed by Lord Stanley, the first Secretary of State for India, in his Despatch of 1859) laid the first basis for a state educational programme in India, several important policies enumerated in the Despatch of 1854 viz., necessity of direct official attempts for mass education, encouragement of the education of women, grant-in-aid to Missionary schools etc. Lord Stanley, the first Secretary of State for India, reviewed the whole position, confirmed all the directives of the Despatch of 1854 (Nurullah and Naik, 1971).

In the Indian Educational Policy of 1904, it was revealed for the first time that the Government of India was committed to the rapid spread of Primary Education. This was one of the foremost duties of the state (Mukherjee, 1966). This policy achieved considerable amount of success, though with slow pace.

During the same time an important feature was observed. Quite an appreciable number of students desired to learn English. In response to the same the Berampore Missionaries established a number of schools. The Church Missionary Society opened ten vernacular schools. David Hare established one vernacular school and one English school in Calcutta. Boys in the vernacular schools were enabled to attend the English school if they so desired. Private English schools were set up by Indians and Eurasians. The dearth of suitable school books was felt and the Calcutta School Book Society was established in 1817. The Government sanctioned donations for the purpose of publication of prescribed books. In 1819, the Calcutta School Society was founded under the patronage of the Governor General. It estab-
lished a number of schools, both English and vernacular all over Bengal, commencing with Calcutta as prime centre. The satisfactory work of the Calcutta School Society drew the attention of the Government which in 1823 sanctioned a monthly grant of Rs.500.00 for the maintenance of the schools under its care. It was the first recognition on part of the Court of Directors in England for the claims of education for the mass of India. Before this grant, the money from the state revenue was mostly spent for higher studies.

The policy of education pursued by the Government since 1854 and upto 1882 was opposed to mass education or education for the common people (Parulekhar, 1934). Education was meant only for the few, the members of the privileged class in the society. This was executed for the purpose of convenience of the Government for securing educated hands, all that was wanted. The Despatch of 1854 had ordered that the Government should pay more attention to Primary Education and active steps be taken towards the education of the mass. A considerable increase of expenditure should be sanctioned for this purpose. The outbreak of the Sepoy Mutiny and its after effects had naturally aroused an awareness for a new educational Despatch named after Lord Stanley, the first Secretary of State, in 1859. It proposed to examine the educational development after 1854 in order to re-determine, if necessary, the role of education in the changed situation. The same view was reiterated in the educational surveys held time to time between 1865-66 and 1870-71. The Indian Education Commission of 1882 also held the same view. But inspite of all such declarations, the progress of Primary Education continued to be slow and sluggish. The problems of
Primary Education, and the failure of Government to extend Primary Education may be attributed to several wrong decisions on administrative and financial issues. The most important of these were:

i. failure to introduce compulsory Primary Education, ii. transfer of Primary Education to the control of local bodies and iii. neglect of the indigenous schools. The first point on compulsory Primary Education is to be focussed in the present work. It is perhaps difficult to initiate "compulsory Primary Education" but in recent time the State Government has made this as free.

In England, compulsory Primary Education had been universally introduced under the Acts of 1870, 1876 and 1880 (Oak, 1925). But the Indian Education Commission of 1882 remained silent on this issue. The ruler of the princely state of Baroda set an experimental example in this field by introducing compulsory Primary Education in one division of his state in 1893. Certain Indian leaders, headed by Gokhale, had been raising the demand for compulsory Primary Education in India and for its acceptance by the Government. But nothing tangible came out of it until after 1902.

Primary Education had been transferred to the control of the local bodies. This transfer was due to several reasons. First, there was a good deal of influence from England, both on policy matters and operational practices. The transfer of Primary Education to the local bodies in India in 1884 was inspired by the elementary education acts of England passed in 1870 and 1876. Second, the doctrine of state withdrawal in education which was initiated in 1854 and then confirmed in 1882 also helped in the same direction.
Private agencies, foreign or Indian Missionaries were not in a position to bear the burden of conducting Primary schools. Hence the burden was shifted to semi-official local bodies. The other reason was attributed to political system. A demand for self rule had been gaining ground and this demand had to be met by the transfer of some responsibility to Indians. It was, therefore, decided that local bodies be created, that Indians be given self-government in their management and that Primary Education be transferred to these newly created bodies. As a result Primary Education became practically a local issue since 1884.

Lord Ripon in his Resolution on local self government had rightly pointed out that such a venture may succeed only i. if additional and adequate resources were made available to the local bodies and ii. if Government officers guided by proper outlook and attitude needed for its execution, would come forward and actively participate for its implementation. The transfer of such a costly responsibility as that of Primary Education involving the mass ought to have been followed simultaneously by the transfer of sufficiently large resources to the local bodies for discharging the responsibility. But no such step was taken. The grant was not to exceed 6\% part of the total expenditure. But credit must go to the local bodies in consideration of the fact that these bodies did render considerable service to the cause of Primary Education in spite of so many handicaps.

It was out of Ripon's policy that local boards and municipal boards were established in all parts of India and rules were framed prescribing the minimum percentage of its income which a local body
might spend on education. Rules, prescribing the powers and duties of local bodies over Primary Education and grant-in-aid codes were also drawn up although those scarcely materialized. But the real beginning of modern Primary Education in India was made by the recommendations of the Education Commission of 1882. The Commission laid emphasis upon state enterprise in education. It also recommended that the control of Primary Education should go to the local authorities. The Commission, however, did not suggest for any uniformity of standards in all the provinces. The school management were given freedom so that they may be free to choose text books for their own schools. Another major recommendation of the Commission was the introduction of the system of 'payment by results'. Thus the administration of Primary Education tended to be decentralised.

The early years of the 20th century witnessed a number of important changes in the field of education under the impact of national movement and the First World War (Basu, 1974). Curzon's influence over the official policy on educational administration remained to continue for some years. The amount of freedom enjoyed so long by the local bodies was curbed to some extent by strengthening bureaucratic centralism.

A main cry of the national education movement (Rai, 1966) which had been gaining momentum, was to Indianize educational administration and control. The Government policy ran contrary to this growing demand, and a conflict became inevitable. This conflict continued till the Montague-Chelmsford (popularly known as Mont-ford) declaration was made in 1919. Education was made a provincial subject. Diarchy in administration was introduced. Education inspite of being a provincial responsibility, received central assistance.
and attention upto the time of Curzon and now it was made not only a provincial but also a transferred subject consequent upon the recommendations of the Munt-ford report. In order to maintain relationship with the states or provinces Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) was set up in 1920 as a coordinating body for giving expert advice on matters related to education.

The impact of the freedom movement as well as the first great war was felt pronouncedly in the field of Primary Education (Mukherjee, 1966). The Government role in this regard was not at all commendable. It is well known than when the eminent nationalist leaders like G. K. Gokhale proposed in 1911 to extend the facilities of Primary Education by suggesting that the Government should bear two-third of the cost of introducing compulsory Primary Education in selected areas and that too just experimentally, the Government rejected it. This negative attitude of the Government could not last long. The Government had to accede to certain concessions on the face of the mounting tide of national movement. Between the period 1918 and 1930, a number of Primary Education Acts were passed in different provinces indicating aftereffects of the initiative taken by Gokhale in this direction (Agarwal, 1973). Primary Education Acts for Bombay were passed first in 1918 and then again in 1920 and 1923. In the year 1919, a Primary Education Act was passed in the provinces of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, the Punjab and Bengal. In 1930, Bengal Rural Primary Act was introduced.

All such Acts on Primary Education made the local authority more powerful and responsible. Primary Education was sought to be expanded under the initiative of the local authorities. These bodies
were asked to prepare developmental schemes in the light of local needs for Primary Education. The question of making Primary Education compulsory in a particular area was left to the consideration of the concerned local authority. Local authorities were empowered to levy local educational cess. Adequate government assistance to the local bodies was ensured. The age of compulsion in principle was about 6 years at the lowest limit and 11 years at the highest. In addition, child-labour was declared illegal. Even then with imposition of the act on child-labour, the system did not change (Gandrade and Gantha, 1983), rather found in fullfledged form in many areas where in the industry employment of child labour is economic.

Under the impact of these Acts, Primary Education was no doubt expanded in the urban areas (Ghosh, et al., 1972) but the picture was dismal in the rural areas. Such areas received scant attention and the expansion made in urban areas was also hasty and very often unplanned. Improvement in the standard of teaching did not show any positive sign. The problem of wastage and stagnation became pronounced.

An Auxiliary Committee of the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as the Hartog Committee after its Chairman Sir Philip Hartog, came as the offshoot of the recommendation made by the Royal Commission presided over by Sir John Simon of 1927. Hartog Committee Report on Indian education is one of the most important educational documents deserving careful consideration.

"Its main recommendations (Primary Education) may be briefly summarised as under: i. A policy of consolidation should be followed; ii. the minimum duration of the Primary Education should be of four
years, iii. the standard of the general education of Primary teachers should be raised; iv. the curriculum of Primary schools should be liberalized; v. school hours and school holidays should be adjusted to seasonal and local requirements; vi. special attention should be given to the lower classes; vii. rural uplift work should be undertaken; viii. Primary Education is a subject of national importance; ix. inspecting staff should be strengthened" (Nurullah and Naik, 1971). Hartog Committee (1929) took all these problems into account and made two important recommendations. It advised to put a halt to any further decentralization of administration and also suggested the government to assume more effective powers to control from the top and improve the administration of Primary Education.

The Bengal Primary Education Act 1919

Herein relevant Acts concerned with Primary Education with special reference to the area under study are to be included so that the awareness and operation of the Government may be understood. The series of Acts on Primary Education in Bengal can be traced back to the Local Self Government Act (Education) of 1884 (Sen, 1925). The most important Act was, however, the Bengal Primary Education Act of 1919. It is rightly considered the first landmark in the legislative history of Primary Education in Bengal in spite of the fact that the Act was meant for Municipal areas only. It was gradually extended to Union Board areas also.

Under the provisions of the Act, the Municipalities were instructed to prepare reports on the following aspect of Primary Education:
1. the number of children in the age group of 6-10 years,
2. enrolment capacity of the existing schools,
3. percentage of attendance and teachers,
4. scheme for expansion and
5. financial involvement and grants needed.

The Municipalities could introduce compulsory Primary Education in their respective areas subject to the approval of the provincial government. That compulsion was, however, restricted to boys only. In the Act, there were provisions for forming school committees and also for drawing up attendance laws.

The Bengal (rural) Primary Education Act of 1930 is provided with far reaching significance and historical importance in the evolution of Primary Education in Bengal. This Act attempted for introducing compulsory Primary Education coming under the age group of 6-11 years within a period of 10 years.

In order to realize this objective, the need for an effective administrative instrument was felt. This need led to the establishment of District School Boards (Sen, 1948). According to the provision of Act, such Boards should consist of the following personnel:

1. District Magistrate,
2. Subdivisional Officer,
3. District Inspector of Schools,
4. Chairman of the Local Boards,
5. Elected non-official members at least two each from the District Boards and the Union Boards.
6. One elected Primary school teacher and
7. At least two nominated non-official members.
The functions of the District Boards were also specified by the provisions of the Act. The functions had four major fields namely, i. preparation of plans, ii. expansion activities, iii. implementation of the programme through actual provisions and arrangements, and iv. management. The District School Boards were empowered to appoint teachers, to make salary provisions, to accord recognitions to schools, to grant aids and to look after all other management aspects of the schools.

The Act provided for education cess at the rate of 5 paise per rupee of land revenue. The wage earners and professional people were however exempted. The District Magistrate was empowered to exact such cess whenever he would feel it proper and necessary. The training of teachers and maintenance of the inspectorate were entrusted upon the provincial Government.

This Act also provided for provincial education committee consisting of the D.P.I., two representatives - one Hindu and one Muslim elected by the District School Boards and five nominated members of whom two would be from the Scheduled caste. This Committee empowered to control the District School Boards, to devolve authority to the lower local bodies such as the Union Boards and also to look after the curriculum as well as the compulsion of Primary Education wherever necessary. As a principle and policy, official control over Primary Education remained supreme. No major amendment to this Act was made up to independence.
The impact of the second World War left its far reaching consequences in the national life of India. There arose a powerful demand for preparing and implementing a comprehensive scheme of reforms in all the major fields of national life (Bose, 1921). The cry for educational reforms also became increasingly vocal. A study Committee under Sir Philip Hartog had submitted a very illuminating report on education as far back as in 1929. It laid stress on Primary Education well integrated with rural life and economy.

The changing circumstances demanded something concrete and comprehensive to be done without any further delay. In answer to this changing demand there came the Sargent Committee under the auspices of the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1944. The report submitted by the Sargent Committee was named as "Post-war Educational Development in India" (1944). This report was recognised as a document of great educational significance in post-Second World war India. Educational reconstruction in independent India has been largely influenced by the suggestions of this report. The Sargent Committee was the first to underline the importance of pre-Primary education. It also asked the government to bear the responsibility for introducing universal, compulsory, free Primary Education for all children within the age group between 6 and 11 years. Benveniste and Benson (1976) also mentions about education from mass to universal education. Training of all teachers in training colleges was also emphasized. But from the light of practical achievement, the report was much ado for nothing. It was more or less a highly ambitious report in consideration of the fact that it ventured to propose for a time bound 40 years programme for attaining equality of educational opportunity in India quite at par with that of
England in 1944. It might have been in reality nothing but a pious wish but it was at the same time a bold, emphatic assertion of a highly commendable goal to be reached within a stipulated time.

As stated earlier, the indigenous form of Primary Education had its root in the country. In this regard the former Bengal was not an exception. A reformed Primary Education came into vogue initiated by the British rulers in accordance with their policy subscribing their political, economic and to some extent social needs. In case of Bengal, the emerging picture was one of inadequacy. It is not too far from the truth to say that in the said system the privileged class was further patronised. This created a further gap between two classes of people - upper and lower. Despite this, the latter class of people was not totally deprived of Primary Education, at least the scope was there, due to the presence of indigenous form of Primary educational set up comprising the pathsala.

The endeavour of the present worker in finding out the statistics of two separate forms of schools did not meet with much success but in course of collection of data with the employment of genealogical and case history methods, it was found that one generation earlier, roughly 30 years back, there were pathsalas in almost all parts of West Bengal. It was more prevalent prior to the mentioned period. Such schools were also present in different areas of the city of Calcutta and in the fringe areas. These schools contributed a lot in the spread of education at Primary stage. These pathsalas were simple in nature. In many of the cases it was a single-teacher institution with an average number of 30 students. Separate rooms
were not there for individual class but all the students used to sit in large rooms or hall. The teacher himself was supposed to be efficient in all the subjects which included Bengali as vernacular, Mathematics – rather simple Arithmetic, English and Science. Teachers of such pathsalas were usually devoted and naturally commanding respect in the society. Punishment was a special feature of such pathsalas and it was perhaps one of the ways to maintain minimum discipline. For punishment to students there was practically no reactions on part of the guardians. In recent time from 60's onward, perhaps all on a sudden those schools were closed and replacement was made by the introduction of a more formal system. The legacies of indigenous system of Primary Education kept few pathsalas to continue for long, covering the British period and the interphase of post-independent era.

IN FURTHERANCE

Primary Education since 1947, initiated a new chapter in the history of education of free India. The legacies of the colonial system and the problems arising out of the same acted as stumbling blocks in the endeavour of educational development. During the British rule Primary Education received scant attention from the foreign rulers for obvious reasons. The most critical question of the eradication of illiteracy through the spread of mass education did not find favour with the ruling class. It has already been pointed out that Gokhale's endeavours for the introduction of free compulsory universal Primary Education as well as the impact of National Education Movement for mass education failed to yield much effective result. After independence a new Constitution was
laid down after a lot of deliberations in the Constituent Assembly which ultimately came to be introduced since 1950. The Constitution declared India as a Sovereign Democratic Union or Republic enunciating the guiding principles, rights and responsibilities, administrative framework and hopes and aspirations of the citizens of free India. The democratic principle of equalisation of educational opportunity was accepted and it was in this context that the constitution made a special proclamation for free and compulsory universal education for children between 6 and 14 years to be implemented within a period of ten years. This naturally laid special emphasis upon the importance of Primary Education to be made accessible to all children of the country as early as possible (Sen, 1966).

The Government of free India decided to introduce Gandhiji's basic education as the national system of Primary Education (Kripalini, 1948, Shrimali, 1949, Bhatia, 1965). Unfortunately this experiment failed within a short period of time for lack of adequate preparation and planning, poor administration and management and more so for lack of proper coordination with the total economic policy pursued by the Government. Basic Education proved inadequate in the background of rapid industrialisation and modern technology (Shrimali, 1965). As a result of this failure the Government policy was switched back to the traditional pattern which continues to exist until now. After independence two National Commissions on Education were appointed - the first one on University education under Dr. Radhakrishnan in 1948 to be followed by the Secondary Education Commission under Dr. L. S. Madhia in 1952-1953. This proves that in spite of the constitutional commitment to Primary Education, the Government did not feel it necessary for starting with any Commission on Primary Education.
Since 1960's certain disturbing developments in the fields of Secondary and Higher education compelled the Government to become more aware of education. Apart from the stupendous impact of mass illiteracy of an alarming nature, the fast declining quality and standard of Secondary and Higher Secondary education were accentuated by an ever increasing number of educated unemployed all over the country. These two factors created a situation of anarchy and crisis in Indian education. It was in this background that the Indian Education Commission entitled Education and Development, under the Chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari came into being in 1964-66 which tried to make a rethinking on education. This Commission stressed on the eradication of illiteracy as the first and foremost task for which universal free Primary Education need to be implemented at all costs and without delay. It was followed by the first National Policy on Education 1968 which promised to realise this goal in practice. Since the 60's Primary Education gained a new momentum and registered a quick pace of expansion and development (Biswas et al. 1976). A number of target oriented schemes were drawn under the Five year plans. From the various statistical data it is observed that Primary Education expanded at a fast rate covering more and more the backward classes and the educationally deprived areas of the country. But in its total estimation the picture failed to depict any commendable success for the percentage of illiteracy remained almost the same inspite of an increasing trend in the percentage of coverage of Primary school population. In order to counteract this dichotomy and contradiction vis-a-vis illiteracy and spread of Primary Education called for the introduction of non-formal and informal education, supplemental to formal Primary
Education. The latest National Policy on Education 1986, is a pointer in this direction. It has suggested for the maximum possible utilisation of indigenous resources and popular grass root participation as envisaged by the "Operation Blackboard" on a national plain (National Education Policy, 1986).

In recent times, in West Bengal, the State Government framed a Commission on Education and the report of the same Committee has been completed (Mitra, 1992). In terms of reference areas covered, Primary Education is accorded priority. In fact, this Commission may be considered as the first of its kind in the area of Primary Education. On the basis of findings a number of suggestions have been recommended. The original report is not readily available to the public but the excerpts are indicative of the fact that the data part is not adequately comprehensive in nature. At the same time many of the recommendations are either illogical or expensive or even both. This reflects a very basic weakness of Government policy with regard to Primary Education.

This overall picture is reflected more or less in the same manner so far as the state of West Bengal is concerned. It is, however, claimed that under the rule of the Left Front Government during the last sixteen years or so the expansion of Primary Education has been one of prime achievements and such success is commendable from a comparative assessment with the rest of the country. From the statistical data this claim deserves partial justification although the rate of illiteracy and the percentage of coverage in respect of Primary School going children do not differ much with the rest. Moreover, from official acceptance
itself it is found that even today there are a good number of villages without any Primary schools and also that more than one third of the existing Primary schools suffer from even minimum educational requirements such as requisite number of teachers, habitable building, furniture, hygienic facilities and in few cases even lack of blackboard. Side by side the percentage of dropouts and stagnation proved to be the most staggering impediment in the expansion of Primary Education both at national and State levels. In order to combat this problem quickly and effectively the Left Front Government brought about significant reforms in the field of Primary Education since 1980-81 with the introduction of a new policy consisting of three main features namely, i. abolition of promotion system through examination in order to put an end to detention and stagnation, ii. introduction of continuous evaluation process followed by automatic promotion in order to eliminate the dropout problem and iii. total abolition of English from the Primary stage so that the learners may find an easier access to education through the mother tongue only. It is not illogical nor impractical, especially when such combined efforts are taken as tests or experiments. It would be worthwhile to make a comparative assessment, between the two phases, prior to introduction of above noted schemes and afterwards. At the same time, strict evaluation is needed for identification of the factors, which are making improvement and so also hindrances.

According to this changeover the curriculum was sought to be recognised on the basis of a more practical life-oriented consideration in the selection of subjects and activities to be taught.
This newly introduced system is being experimented upon for about a decade. This research worker has undertaken a study work on the possible effects and results of this experimentation through a survey based on investigation.