I have selected a comparatively important topic — adult education, which is at present an important area for a developing country like India. Of course, adult education is not a new phenomenon. It has a long history in India. Over the centuries we have evolved several important forms of non-formal education so that an average Indian who was an illiterate, for want of access to formal education, could still be considered as a man of an enlightened society.

Adult education is indispensable in the modern society, which is progressing rapidly in science and technology with corresponding changes in the social structure, human behaviour and responsibilities. The rapid outdating of knowledge which is an important characteristic of the present day, has made adult education both a necessity and a vital tool for the all round development of the individual and nation. Adult education is necessary for developing and fostering human qualities of mutual understanding, integrating respect, sympathy and co-existence. Adult education is a pre-requisite for national development. Although the returns cannot be measured with precision, investment in human resources is a prime factor contributing to economic and social betterment.

With the advancement of scientific and technical knowledge, establishment of representative forms of government, fast development in the modes and means of communication and other social changes, the
meaning of adult education has been widened immensely and it covers almost everything that stands for education. Adult education at present is regarded as life-long education for every normal human being. It is not a mere belated education for the illiterate adults. In a wider sense it is a life-long process of learning for all and its content is as wide and varied as human knowledge. In order to achieve such a goal through adult education, the socio-economic condition among the illiterates must be studied and the obstacles must be eliminated. Keeping in view the present state of socio-economic conditions, the illiterate adults must be properly motivated to get interested in the adult education programme along with imparting functional literacy with suitable economic activities.

The adult education programme is basically a rural education programme, the success of which mainly depends on motivating an economically hard-pressed people for some form of education, or as the expression goes, for functional literacy. It is needless to mention that Assam has some experience in the field of expanding education with a rural bias. Over the years it has been observed that due to some serious problems, several schemes of the adult education programme have failed. There are some socio-economic problems in the State which stand in the way of implementing the programme.

The present study is an attempt to find out the socio-economic problems that stand in the way of implementing the adult education
programme in Assam and to suggest measures to gear up the speedy expansion of it so that the mass illiteracy can be eradicated from this State. So, the present study throws ample light on the socio-economic problems that prevail among the two sections of population of Assam, (a) those who can afford economically but lack the willingness to have adult education — specially, the tea-garden labourers; and (b) those who cannot afford to have adult education without economic benefit.

But it is very difficult to undertake such a work as the source materials in the field of adult education are very limited in our State. However, a humble attempt has been made to collect relevant materials from some reliable sources and from the field in order to complete the work. Having the sole aim of delving deep into the socio-economic problems of adult education that prevail in Assam, a survey work has been undertaken and it throws some light on the socio-economic problems and working of the programme in Assam. While I went to the adult education centres for survey, I noticed a good deal of fervour and enthusiasm among the instructors and adult learners. This attitude is really encouraging.

The present work cannot be claimed as a comprehensive literature. It is simply an analysis of the subject because inspite of great effort involved in this work, it is sincerely felt that the work is not thoroughly intensive as it should have been. However, it is my sincere
belief that the present work will throw some ray of light on the socio-economic problems in the implementation of the adult education programme in this State and to suggest some possible measures for speedy expansion of it.

I hope this work will be considered as a pioneer work, opening the provision of more discussions on the socio-economic problems in the implementation of the adult education programme in Assam.

Dated Gauhati University
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MAHORANJAN DAS