CHAPTER - I

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It is an oft-repeated as well as an undeniable fact that education is a multi-faceted process with all its immense lot of potential for bringing about changes at economic, social, cultural and political levels.

As far as the economic front is concerned, education can educate people to improve their skills to increase production. Further, it can pave the way for economic equality by making people highly conscious of their rights as a result of which more vociferous demands will be made to pressurise the authority to reduce the existing inequalities. Added to that, education would usher in an era of prosperity by facilitating greater transmission of sophisticated technology into the rural sector which is indispensable in an agrarian country like India where the agricultural sector has always been straying behind due to lack of technological innovations and implementations.

In the social sphere, education can play a vital role in the form of a catalyst by inculcating the values and attitudes which are modern and reasonable to bring about the required social changes. It can stir the down-trodden out of their misery and can make them live an energetic and active life by shedding their robe of silence. Education helps a person to be constantly conscious of his own self as well as his environment. Surprisingly enough, it is the same consciousness through which society is changed on the political front too. Intelligent and politically conscious
electorate is a pre-condition for a sound and true democracy and it is possible only through education. The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) rightly observes - "The object of a democratic education is, therefore, the full all-round development of every individual's personality. This requires that education should take into account all his needs - psychological, social, emotional and practical - and cater to all of them."¹

Obviously, education is an indispensable aspect in a democracy. It is the foundation stone on which the edifice of democracy is safely laid. Democracy is meaningless in a land of illiterates; it can never flourish. Illiteracy will cast irremovable barriers on the progressive ways of political, social and economic spheres. Contrarily, the literates are always conscious of the basic principles of democracy as well as their own rights. They can execute their responsibilities wisely so that progress may be achieved in all spheres. Among illiterates, democracy is practically a showpiece. Regrettably enough, in a democratic country like India, illiterates have an overwhelming majority. It is one of the few countries in the world, which has a large illiterate population.

From the Census of India 1981, it may be seen that the total number of literates in the country excluding the State of Assam and Jammu & Kashmir was 257.99 millions. As per the Census figures released later on,

the number of literates in Jammu & Kashmir was 1.56 millions. The Census has not yet been held in Assam. If we apply all-India growth rate of literacy during 1971-81 to Assam, the estimated number of literates for Assam comes to 6.27 millions. Thus the total number of literates in the country during 1981 comes to 145.82 millions. The total population of the country including provisional figures for Jammu & Kashmir and estimated population of Assam for 1981 was 583.78 millions. Percentage of literacy on the basis of this data for the country comes to 35.95 as against 36.17, which excluded Assam and Jammu & Kashmir. The number of illiterates of all age-groups on this basis comes to 437.96 millions, of which, 189.33 millions were male and 248.63 millions female. Illiterate population formed 64.05 per cent of the total population and it was 75.26 per cent in respect of females.2

The above data shows that the magnitude of illiteracy in India is still very high. Its magnitude is so large that India is the only country (excluding China) where the number of adult illiterates is more than 100 millions. Of the estimated total number of 814 million adult illiterates in the world in 1980, 243 million illiterates forming 29.8 per cent of the total, were in India. The number of adult illiterates in India was more than eight times the number of illiterates in any other country in the world (excluding China).3

3. Ibid., p. 14
As it is an age of rapid advancement of science, technology and knowledge explosion, a democracy has got the least chance of survival without literacy. Unfortunately and regretably, India has got nearly 64.05 per cent of its population groping in darkness because of its illiteracy. Obviously, illiteracy is one of the most complicated problems of our country generating innumerable social evils like traditionalism, superstitions, ignorance etc. Efforts to bring about reforms in social, economic and political spheres amidst the existing illiteracy will be futile and it is akin to building castles in air. There can be no complete and active participation of the people in national and international civic life without literacy.

In this context it can very well be stated who are termed as illiterates. It can be said that besides the school going students and the persons belonging to that particular age-group, a considerable number of illiterate adults are there in India, who for certain unavoidable reasons had to discontinue their primary education or did not at all get any opportunity of having primary education, should undoubtedly be called illiterates. And the system of education which has been introduced with a view to educating these illiterate adults is called adult education.

There are two different agencies to impart education. They are the formal and the informal. Formal agencies function with a definite form and well-defined objectives at hand. A well set framework catering to a certain age group is an essential aspect of the formal education. It
includes educational institutions like schools, colleges and other educational institutions for specialised training. Contrarily, informal education lacks in such set rules and regulations. It is incidental. The prevalent adult education is a useful example for informal education. It is given through some informal agencies just to improve the social life of the adults. Like formal education, it never includes educational institutions such as schools, colleges and other institutions for specialised training. As it is incidental, no deliberate attempt either on the part of the teacher or the taught is made in bringing upon the influences.

Adults, the persons who are eighteen years or above have a major part in steering the social life. They occupy a considerable portion in the bulk of population. If a considerable number of adults are left uneducated, the repercussions would be felt in all aspects of social life. Socio-economic conditions, production and general living conditions will deteriorate. Keeping in mind the vast numbers that comprise our adult population, adult education, inspite of being an informal education should be popularised to find a solution to the problem of educating them. The Education Commission (1964-66) has rightly stated, "Education does not end with schooling, but it is a life-long process." Obviously, education can be continued throughout the long span of life of an individual through adult education. Presently, adult education has assumed a

new meaning and shape shedding its worn-out title of belated instruction in three R's for the illiterate and uneducated adults. Now it is popularly known as a life-long education for all without exception. In the long span of life we have enough time and opportunities to adjust ourselves to the changing situations of life. The adjustment is effected by education and in particular it is adult education which provides enough training in the life's constant and dynamic process of adjustment.

India is a bundle of contradictions in many spheres of life. Here, opposites stand juxtaposed in sharp contrast—tradition versus modernism, stark ignorance versus brilliant wisdom and extreme affluence versus dire poverty. India having an electorate of 364 million people is widely known as the biggest democratic state. It is true to say that such wide civic rights and responsibilities now vested in the people have certainly a general educative influence. There is a constant growth of awareness among the people who are getting acquainted with their civic responsibilities. The very process of holding the elections and the way the voters conduct themselves are indicative of the educational impact of democracy. In this context, it is to be realised that the importance of franchise can not fully be understood merely by casting the votes once in five years. It is education which on a universal scale can educate the mass-mind. Democracy and education are inseparable and inter-related. They are complementary. Adult franchise has no meaning in the absence of adult education. In the same way, education without adult franchise may lead to

complications. Despite the growing consciousness among people, in a country like India adult education is the need of the hour to make the people attain full nationhood in the near future.

Being convinced of the fact that there can be no democracy without literacy or fundamental education, it requires immediate attention on attaining as well as maintaining national literacy. The system of primary or elementary education is the fundamental factor in promoting national literacy. Adult education is a supplement to the elementary education and it consolidates the task of elementary education. In the fast growing countries like England and America, elementary education itself is sufficient as it is universal, obligatory and compulsory and is provided till the age of sixteen. In such countries elementary education itself is enough to produce national literacy as well as to consolidate it. Quite contrarily, primary education in India is of poor standard as it is only four years' schooling up to the age of 10 or 11. The standard and the content of our primary education are quite naturally not at par with that of elementary education prevalent in more progressive countries. Added to that, it is a statistically proved fact that out of the cut-turn of our 4 year primary schools at least 30 per cent relapse into illiteracy for lack of facilities for further education. Even the sophisticated and the result-oriented elementary education of the West is reported to have failed to bring about cent per cent functional literacy. It is due to this fact, they have opted for adult education programmes to cover a wide
section of the society. Adult education bridges over the loop-holes left by the regular school system.

The need of the hour is to educate the teeming millions of India and to bring them up to the level of modern scientific, technological and social development. It is to be acknowledged that the right of adult franchise conferred on millions of Indians emphasizes the importance of mass-education. The adult voter is the master of our country. He is the person who marks the destiny of our nation. He should be helped to understand his social and civic obligations as well as the rights implied in adult franchise. In a democratic country, an adult voter has not only the right to vote but he has also got the right to be voted for to represent his people. It is education which could enable a person to understand the intrinsic nature of a democratic set up.

It is illusory to think that adult education alone would bring about the required changes. It is futile to pay enormous attention to the development of adult education forgetting the importance of the primary education. The child of to-day is the adult of tomorrow. By being the torch-bearer of the tradition of his elders, the child will be influenced greatly by what his elders do or think and will grow up accordingly. The primary education deserves much care while planning and executing a scheme for children's education. If adult education is

left neglected, it would leave things half-done. As neither of these systems of education can eradicate mass-illiteracy single-handedly, there is an urgent need for obligatory and universal primary education as well as a comprehensive adult education.

From the above discussion it can easily be stated that adult education is very much important for Indian people from several grounds. In the words of W.E. Styler: "India's belief in adult education is a result of her own educational needs and her attachment to the principles of democracy. She upholds the idea that free government through freedom of speech and expression, freedom of organisation and free elections is the best form of government. She is committed to a social policy which may comprehensively be described as 'socialism'; the main feature of this is to direct development towards ensuring that the living conditions of the mass of her people who are socially, economically and educationally deprived shall be improved."

Further he adds: "Education she believes to be a social right which all individuals should enjoy. Because Indian conditions make it difficult to provide an opportunity for all children to go to school it is urgent and important that mass education should be provided for the great number of adults who had no, or insufficient, education in early life. The eradication of illiteracy is a vital necessity because illiteracy is one of the

7. Styler, W.E., Adult Education in India, Oxford University Press, Apollo Bunder, Bombay 1 NR, 1966, p. 2
worst forms of human deprivation in contemporary society.\(^8\)

In India where mass-illiteracy exists to the fullest extent, adult education is not an alternative; it is a necessity. As our people are ignorant of the ways and means to better themselves, they are destined to lead a very poor life. Illiteracy breeds ignorance and poverty. An illiterate is always ignorant. As he is ignorant, he is poor. In this context of our moving forward in economic, political and social spheres with definite goals ahead, it is really fitting to think of the legitimate role of adult education.

The thinking on adult education is based on the following assumptions: (a) that illiteracy is a serious impediment for the growth of an individual and his country's socio-economic progress; (b) that education is a life-long process and is not conteminarious with schooling, but takes place in most work and life situations; (c) that learning, working and living are inseparable and they are meaningless without being correlated with others; (d) that the means by which people are involved in the process of development are atleast as important as the ends, and (e) that the illiterate and the poor can be uplifted and can acquire their own liberation only through literacy, dialogue and action.

Adult education is increasingly being seen in its totality. Liveright and Haygood proposed that "adult education is the process whereby persons

\(^8\) Ibid., pp. 2-3
who no longer (or did not) attend school on a regular and full-time basis undertake sequential and organised activities with a conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding or skills, appreciation and attitudes, or for the purpose of identifying and solving personal or community problems.°

Illustrating the aims and objectives of adult education the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation opines, "the term adult education denotes the entire body of organised educational processes, whatever content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications and bring about changes in their attitude or behaviour in the two-fold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development. Adult education embraces all forms of educative experiences needed by men and women according to their varying interest and requirements at their differing levels of comprehension and ability, and in their changing roles and responsibilities throughout life."°


The full text of the UNESCO draft has a section on the aims of adult education and includes the following:

- developing a critical understanding of major contemporary problems and social changes,
- developing the aptitude for acquiring new knowledge, qualifications, attitudes or forms of behaviour;
- ensuring the individual's conscious and effective incorporation into the world of work;
- promoting increased awareness of the relationship between people and their physical and cultural environment;
- creating an understanding of and respect for the diversity of customs and cultures.

To these may be added aims which tend to be more specifically functional in their elaboration. An example of this comes from Nigeria where the national objectives in adult education were cited as being:

(i) to provide functional literacy education for adults who have never had the advantage of any formal education;

(ii) to provide functional remedial education for those young people who prematurely dropped out of the formal system;

(iii) to provide further education for different categories of comple-
ters of the formal education system in order to improve their basic know-
ledge and skills.

11. See cit.
(iv) to provide in-service, on-the-job, Vocational and Professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills; and

(v) to give the adult citizen of the country the necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

It is in this context of social, political and economic progress with definite goals ahead, the rightful role of adult education is to be considered. The main role of adult education lies in making all adults conscious of their rights and responsibilities so as to contribute their share in bringing about tremendous changes in agricultural and industrial advancement of the nation. The citizens are to be kept in constant touch with intellectual and technical aspects to face the emerging challenges in nation-building. Further, the lack of leadership at all levels which leads to a crisis in our nation can effectively be dealt with by adult education and the resources can be mobilized for the betterment of the people.

Again adult education has got a direct link with the economic, social and political development programmes as it is rightly as well as widely acclaimed as a programme of community development. The main thrust of the programme does not lie in informing the learner about his predicament alone; it lies in enabling him to critically examine his predicament thereby creating an irresistible urge in him to bring about drastic and radical changes.
Adult education is to play a prominent role in explaining the contents of the constitution to the uninformed illiterate mass. As has already been quoted, India is a region of contradictions in every sphere of life. In our democratic set up inequality and exploitation reign supreme. These evils are to be made known to the mass through literacy which would create a renewed consciousness and a will to set things right. This will no doubt produce repercussions amidst a group of the elite who intend to keep the majority in eternal darkness for personal reasons. The would-be hostility that may arise out of this action is merely a whiff in the breeze considering the beneficial aspects of the action. A result-oriented adult education should aim at shattering the existing status quo and should be prepared to meet the challenges and hostile voices from the defenders of the present rigid and worn-out hierarchical system.

It is quite erroneous to consider that education is merely a tool to develop discipline. Currently this notion has undergone a change giving way to the conception that education is closely related to society and is a social product to bring about the required social changes. In this way it seeks to bring education and economy under one plan and organise manpower to its best in relation to economy. In this connection Dr. (Mrs) Rajkumari Chandrasekaran clearly observes — "Education is an essential component of national development. Although the returns cannot be measured with precision, investment in human-resources is undoubtedly a prime-factor contributing to economic and social betterment. The formal school system
of education, however, is only one aspect, albeit important of the overall educational effort. In many developing countries, a very large population possibly the majority, have either never been to school or have been given insufficient time for formal teaching to have much of a beneficial effect. Under such conditions, adult education assumes an even more important role for it provides a varied and extensive net-work of educational opportunities to buttress the process of national development.\(^1\)

In view of the growing demand and necessity for the implementation of adult education programmes various programmes were duly introduced with a genuine motive of promoting literacy among the illiterates of our country enabling them to develop their skills and to be in constant touch with the important happenings around them. This has led to a reawakening of their rather clouded consciousness shedding their worn-out views of yore. A new era dawned in the beginning of the twentieth century when the National Movement developed a new feeling of consciousness and a fervent patriotism among the Indian masses. Our leaders, finding the importance of education pressed the British Government to expand national education to every nook and corner of India. They demanded the expansion of education not only among the children but also among the illiterate adults of India. As a result, efforts in the sphere of adult education started in India from 1909 and since that moment adult education is progressive changing its

necessity of adult education is widely felt by one and all in a growing democracy like India where an adult is an important factor in deciding the future of his country. Having these notions in mind, adult education is being provided free of cost to the Indian adult with a view to making them play a definite role in the democratic India. Though adult education is given under various names like Adult Education Programme or Continuing Education or Social Education or Non-formal Education or Farmers Functional Literacy Programme or Rural Functional Literacy Project or Post-literacy and Follow-up Programme, the motive is the same. It is to make the poor illiterates of India conscious of the present state of affairs in India.

Considering this fact, when the Janata Party came to power in March, 1977, the then Union Education Minister, P.C. Chunder made a statement on the floor of Parliament on the 5th April, 1977 declaring that, along with universalisation of elementary education, highest priority in educational planning would be accorded to adult education. Consequently, several policies and programmes were drawn up by eminent educationists and social scientists during the tenure of the newly formed Janata Government. The policies and programmes of the Ministry of Education aimed at the removal of the prevalent illiteracy in a time-bound programme. On the basis of extensive consultations with educationists and adult education field workers

a Draft Policy Statement on Adult Education and an Outline of the National Adult Education Programme were prepared to launch the programme from October 2, 1978 an auspicious day, the day being the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. The programme was expected to reach 65 million of adults during the Sixth Plan and the working group hoped that the programme would reach the target of 100 million before 1983-84. The then Union Education Minister fervently believed that the programme would be fruitful in the long run after his elaborate consultations with the then Members of Parliament, youth leaders, cultural, social and political organisations, representatives of trade unions, college and university teachers.

The National Policy of Education, 1986 also recognises the importance of adult education as a contribution to creating the demand for education in the society. It envisages that adult education would be a means for reducing economic, social and gender disparities. According to this policy, the principal aim of the National Programme of Adult Education is to provide education, including literacy, to the population in 15-35 age-group, which numbers about 100 million. Previous experience has brought out that programmes of literacy can become meaningful only when they come along with a package comprising practical information and skills relevant to day-to-day needs of learners. The National Programme of Adult Education would, therefore, among other things, lay emphasis on skill development, and creation of awareness among the learners of the national goals, of development programmes, and for liberation from
oppression. It would be a phased time-bound programme, covering approximately 40 million by 1980 and another 60 million by 1995.  

In spite of all the fervent and sincere efforts to boost the adult and to popularize adult education, the programme has not reached the remote destinations. It is indeed a matter to be regretted. Most of the attempts made for educating the illiterate have turned futile and a vast majority of people are still groping in darkness. Since the dawn of independence efforts have been made to better the standard of living of the poor masses in vain. They are where they were. The occupants of rural sectors and slums have not so far seen and experienced the dawn of prosperity. It is not fair to say that there has been no progress at all in adult education programme. There has been, yet, despite the progress made during the last 40 years, the poor and their problems have been left unheard. It is to be regretted that seventy five per cent of the population are lacking in even the basic necessities like health-care, nutrition, housing, education and social services. Decades back, it was believed that monetary investments and industrialization would bring about a scene of prosperity up-lifting the downtrodden to an affluent state. Our hopes have never materialised inspite of the huge investment of the successive five year plans. 

The sad neglect of mass education, in the rural sector, is evident from several village-based studies. The neglect generates great losses both individually and socially. It is a fact that millions of illiterates in India are existing leading a life of ill-health, ignorance and poverty and they perpetuate the vicious cycle of their liabilities. Their lack of education prevents them from participating in development programmes. Incessant efforts are taken to construct and to strengthen the infrastructure for rural development and contrary to our expectations the benefits do not necessarily flow to the needy clientele as they are ignorant, lethargic and are not aware of their rights. Unfortunately, illiteracy, poverty, disease and hunger are closely related and always go hand in hand. This kind of affairs will bring about unrest and resentment endangering the stable democratic set-up and social order. It would end up in unproductive revolution. In this way illiteracy is a curse. It blocks the progress of the individual, society and the nation. This is only because of that the adult education programmes have not become totally successful due to the some socio-economic problems like class and conflicts, conservativeness, ignorance, inequality of opportunity in education, sources of exploitation, lack of interest, lack of employment opportunities, poverty, disease etc.

Besides these, there are various reasons why our efforts to eradicate illiteracy have become futile. Insofar as our efforts in the past

are concerned, they were not sincere and result-oriented. Added to that, India suffered under the foreign yoke for a very long time. The policy of the Britishers was not in accordance with the socio-economic conditions of our country. This did great harm to education as well as the economy of our country. The Downward Filtration Theory turned down all the expectations and did immense harm to the cause of mass education. The Britishers transferred the management of elementary schools to the local authorities to make primary education compulsory, free and universal without providing them with the necessary amenities to implement the same. The responsibilities entrusted to the local authorities bore no fruit as they had no fund to popularise it. Instead, this action in the past has paved the way for the prevalent neglect of mass education. In England the case was different. Compulsory primary education was started in the middle of the nineteenth century and the progress has been rapid as children are compulsorily brought to schools and illiteracy has become a thing of the past. Compulsory education became a success in England through models brought from India to cope with the short-comings. In this connection, Joseph Lancaster and Bell are remembered for their efforts to eradicate illiteracy in England. They were in the service of the East India Company and they closely observed Indian methods of teaching in elementary school and polished them to propagate them in England. It is reported that —

"Lancaster claimed that a thousand children may be taught and governed by one master only. His mechanical plan was nothing more than making the older pupils called monitors to teach the three R's. Upon his plans one single book was sufficient for the whole school. He taught arithmetic from lessons which he had constructed for the purpose and the monitor might correct and teach the principles even if he were not fully acquainted with them himself." 18

Compulsory primary education can very well serve to eradicate illiteracy. During the British regime compulsory primary education led to greater wastage of resources which in turn served as an excuse for the foreign rulers not to popularise compulsory primary education. Mr. Gopal Krishna Oakhale was pressing the authorities to implement and to expand compulsory primary education for the children of India. But his voice was very feeble in the mass of the foreign rule. Their only excuse was the huge figures of wastage as a result of implementing compulsory primary education. It is to be remembered that in any developing country there will be a little amount of wastage while introducing compulsory education scheme. But this should not be a deterring factor in eradicating illiteracy. The scheme of compulsory primary education was taken up in India once again only after the departure of the Britishers. Regrettably, our country is still on its way of introducing it. This is due to the lack of sufficient

18. Smith, L., Education in Great Britain, OUP, 1964, p. 100
fund and proper administration. There is a directive in the Constitution of India to provide compulsory primary education upto the age of 14. The Constitution of India gave a time limit of 10 years to introduce the scheme which has already expired in 1961.

It is an obvious fact that our people are still groping in the dark due to the absence of educational facilities and the existence of acute poverty. They are still ignorant and superstitions. The state of affairs being so, it is the pressing problem of the present to put all our efforts in to raising the standards of education of our people to the betterment of our nation as a whole.

Assam, one of the states of India in the north-eastern region has become smaller after re-organisation of states. Yet, the manifold problems of Assam are by no means smaller due to the existence of various people with their varied languages, customs and traditions. Compared to other states, Assam lies far behind in matters of education and economic progress. In spite of being backward, Assam has experienced some programmes of expanding education with a rural bias. In 1939, a Mass Literacy Campaign was launched in Assam and was taken up a good number of years after independence giving major importance for non-formal education programme. This was introduced under a scheme of expansion of social education and Farmer's Functional Literacy Programme and adult education programmes which belonged to this scheme of non-formal education. In this context it is to be recalled that in accordance with the National Adult Education Programme introduced by the
Government of India in the Ministry of Education in 1978, the Government of Assam too prepared a Draft Adult Education Plan for the period of 1978-79 to 1984-85 with a genuine motive of rooting out illiteracy from this part of our country. It aimed at eradicating the existing illiteracy among the people belonging to the age-group of 15-35. As per schedule the programme was launched and is still progressive in Assam as it is in the other states of India. Of late, it has been detected that despite sincere efforts, several schemes of adult education programme have failed due to various reasons. The still prevalent socio-economic problems of Assam serve as a stumbling block while implementing the programme. In this connection, presently there is a pressing necessity to make a broad study of the socio-economic problems among two sections of population:

(a) those who can afford economically but are not willing to have adult education - specially, the tea-garden labourers; and

(b) those who cannot afford to have education without economic benefit.

The tea-garden labourers and the people alike have a natural aversion to learning. They are not economically hardpressed. As their interests lie elsewhere they do not find education interesting. They are inclined towards indulging in cheap merry-making, gambling and drinking. So, naturally they cultivate an aversion to learning and they do not like to while away their moments of leisure in Adult Education Centres. Some people
belonging to the poor income group who are to keep themselves engaged in
some profit-gaining work in their leisure, cannot think of spending that
time for the purpose of having education at the Adult Education Centres
without any economic benefit. There are also people below the poverty line
who are always so much obsessed with their worries and problems that
despite their willingness, they can hardly pay due attention to it.
Besides these, there are numerous socio-economic problems which are in the
way of successfully implementing the programme.

An immediate analysis of the existing obstructive socio-economic
problems will certainly give way to taking remedial measures and it will
result in successful expansion of adult education programmes. In the present
study, sincere efforts will be taken to find out the socio-economic prob-
lems that jeopardise the implementation of adult education programmes
specially in Assam. Added to that, the remedial measures will be hinted
at to gear up the speedy expansion of it with a view to rooting out the
existing evil of mass illiteracy.