

ADULT EDUCATION AT ALL LEVELS

by

SHRIMATI LAKSHMI MENON

1. Education for rural communities, including food production and preservation, health and nutrition education, family planning and education in child care, elementary bookkeeping, community leadership.

2. We talk of education for rural communities on the assumption that their needs are different from those of urban areas. To a large extent this has been the bane of our programmes - programmes devised by urban planners for rural people. It is true there is vast disparity in the progress and development of these areas; but these differences are being gradually and irrevocably minimised by easy communication and the need to increase our food production. The tendency among rural communities in India is not to maintain the semi-isolation in which they live and their special characteristics, but fall in line with urban ways. That is why the cream of the rural population desert their village homes to seek opportunities of education and employment in urban areas. A totally different kind of education-craft oriented basic education - was evolved and tried in the late thirties and early forties in India on the crest of the national struggle for freedom. It met with temporary success and died a natural death when it was abandoned in preference to the much-maligned existing system.

3. The purpose of any educational system should not be to perpetuate differences among groups and communities but forge ever-growing bonds of unity and understanding among them. The moment the rural community feels that it is offered a different kind of education it is bound to think it must be something inferior designed to keep it in perpetual bondage. "Are our children always to plough the land while your children are trained to rule us" asked an angry rural youth to the urban leader pleading for the Basic system of education. It is necessary, therefore, that any system of education planned for rural communities should take into account the sensitiveness of people who are denied the essentials of life enjoyed by their counterparts in the cities. Hence rural education should be so framed and administered that the purpose of unity and the need for integration are kept in focus.

4. Far from regarding rural India as different from urban India, I would rather think of it as the under-developed part of a rapidly developing country. Just as developed nations offer various kinds of aid to bring backward countries into line with them so also states should so devise their plans for education that rural areas and communities may reach the desired parity.

5. The next important question is why do we want adult education for rural communities. We are told that in 1960 there were 740 million adult illiterates or 39.3% of the total adult population of the world, and that in 1970 their number will go up to 800 millions. A good proportion of this group belongs to India. Our literacy figures reveal that there is a vast difference in the rates of literacy in urban and rural areas as well as for men and women. 76% of India's population over the age of 5 are illiterate. Of this 60% are males and 87% females. Literacy rate has gone up from 19.1% in 1951 to 27.4% in 1961. While it has gone up from 34.6% to 47% in urban areas, in the rural areas it was only from 12.1% to 19%. As far as female literacy is concerned the rise is from 7.9% in 1951 to 12.8% in 1961. The census of 1971 may reveal further progress but it is very doubtful whether the gap will be narrowed to any considerable extent as the progress is likely to be neutralised by growth of population. As it is we find that while the number of literates has gone up from 60 million in 1951 to 103 millions in 1961, illiterates also have gone up from 249 to 269 millions. This of course does not take notice of the vast numbers, in some places as high as 60% of the first year, of those enrolled who drop out and lapse into illiteracy for want of reading material or interest in keeping up the ability to read and write. It is against this rather depressing background that we have to view the problem of adult education for rural communities.

6. The second reason why we want adult education for rural communities is that India is committed to democracy. In a democracy it is necessary that important decisions and policies must have people's support to be effectively implemented. They must also be made an integral part of an enthusiastic national venture for better living. This is not possible today. People's enthusiasm cools when they realise that it is a tiny minority of 1% or 2% which determines our social policies, economic programmes and political beliefs.

7. In almost all the developing countries the attainment of political freedom is identified with the achievement of economic prosperity. Economic prosperity is not possible unless people

are educated to grasp the problems confronting them and find solutions for them.

8. These policies and programmes, however well-intentioned, however clearly formulated, however conducive to public good, will feel fail to rouse the enthusiasm of the people if they are not intelligently informed about their implications in daily struggle for living. Today, our government have to struggle with difficulties such as lack of understanding, conservatism and resistance in the form of unwillingness to co-operate. The magnitude of the problem as well as the difficulty of finding a solution may well be imagined.

9. Thirdly we have to take into account the limited resources for educational expansion in developing countries like India. The argument whether priority should be given to industrialisation, food production or education is not valid as all the three are equally important and closely related. Agricultural improvement demands better techniques and scientific knowledge and these can be had more easily with adult education. Political stability, economic development and social progress are so inter-related that without education and training in citizenship it is not possible to achieve any one of them. Lack of adequate financial resources to meet heavy educational demand insists that alternative programmes should be initiated to meet the problem. Moreover there is the feeling that mere literacy is not enough to produce the social revolution. So the only alternative to formal education is adult or social education. Thus it is obvious that our belief in adult education is the result of our own educational needs and attachment to democratic principles. It is estimated that nearly 80% of our population live in rural India. The central purpose of our education in rural areas will be, in the words of a planner " to create a burning desire to change their old times outlook and arouse enthusiasm in them for new knowledge and new ways of life". In other words rural communities should be motivated to accept change - a desire for better living conditions, a will to achieve them and confidence in their power to achieve the desired goals.

10. Adult education was re-christened social education to express the idea that people need more than anything a social orientation, a habit of citizenship which put the needs of citizenship above individual interests. In other words it is an attempt to harmonise individual urges with social aspirations.

11. In a sense India is still a primitive country as the problem of food still forms our main concern. Prof. Rostov has divided the process of modernisation into five stages. We are still in the first stage of traditional society. A few of us may have reached the second stage, namely, the pre-condition of take-off stage. By means of adult education we have to draw the rural communities out of their traditional milieu and complete the pre-condition of take-off stage so that we may reach the take off stage namely as self-generating, self-reliant economy.

12. Since food production has been the main, perhaps the only, concern of our rural communities, the task of adult education at that level would be to concentrate on it primarily with a look at the future. Food production can never be an isolated activity in an organised civilised society as it depends on various other factors. A knowledge regarding seeds, new high yielding strains, scientific agricultural techniques and practices which are conducive to higher yields, preservation and storage of food grains, use of fertilisers and pesticides, research on the use of chemical fertilisers and a host of other activities have become imperative for efficient agricultural operations. To paraphrase Napoleon's dictum it will not be incorrect to say that a nation moves on its stomach before it can stand or walk. Hence the overwhelming importance of agriculture in the education programme of rural communities. In order to awaken the people it is the women who have to be awakened; once they are on the move, the household moves, the village moves, the country moves to bring about this much indeed awakening.

13. To meet the situation of food production and effect the necessary social changes for that purpose in the traditional society, the Community Development programme was launched in 1952. The basic programme of adult education had to be built up round agriculture, food production and preservation, health, diet, nutrition etc. Strangely enough, at the initial stages there was no idea of including women in the programme. Soon it was revealed that any attempt towards improvement of community living has to take women along with it. To bring about this much needed awakening, a large number of women workers, gram sevikas, was needed. In 1955-56 the Ministry of Food and Agriculture established 27 Home Science wings all over India as integral parts of agricultural Extension Training Centres. In each of these wings 20 gram sevika trainees had to undergo training for a year. The course includes, family foods, nutrition, clothing for families, mother and child care, housing, management of the home, health, sanitation, handicrafts, cottage

industries, agriculture including dairy farming, poultry or bee-keeping etc. After training they live in the villages and work with rural homes to effect desirable changes in the way of living. The main objective is to raise the standard of living through improved use of available resources. In the rural areas as well as in urban areas, more so in rural areas, inadequacies of diet are not always due to poverty. Very often it is due to ignorance, custom and caste and tribal prejudices. Certain castes have strict tabus about food. Meat eaters may not eat certain kinds of meat because of religious tabus. Thus the Hindus may not eat beef nor Muslims pork. There is prejudice against poultry. Most farmers in rural areas do not eat the vegetables they grow for the market. Among certain tribes milk is tabu and now it is given as medicated beverage. Urban areas, where people are educated enough to understand the unreasonableness of these, are fast giving up these restrictions. Methods of cooking also leave much to be desired and the village worker has to instruct the women the need to preserve the nutrient in the food by scientific handling. Protein deficiency in our national diet has been a source of considerable anxiety. Even among the well-to-do and the educated, there is considerable reluctance to abandon traditional ways and prejudices which stand in the way of dietetic changes. For example, it is estimated that the per capita availability of protein in India is about 71.5 grammes while the average protein consumption is only about 51 grammes.

14. Dr. Parpia in an article in F.A.O. estimates that almost 24 million tons of food grains were lost in handling and storage out of India's current production of 95.6 million tons. Waste control measures can halve this loss and modern and more scientific methods can eliminate 10% of the waste. Heavy losses occur at different stages of food handling, processing, storage and distribution and consumption. And 70% of the food is stored and consumed in rural India and this is where control measures for the prevention of losses should have the maximum impact. Unfortunately literacy and knowledge of modern science are extremely limited in rural areas and adult education with large female participation seems to be the only solution to the problems of waste, bag storage and handling of food grains.

15. Community Development programme failed to produce the expected result for three reasons: (1) It is generally noticed that rural programmes must have an economic significance to be accepted by rural communities. Rural response to a programme from women depends on its usefulness to them. For instance, in Orissa it was difficult to get women to participate in Community

Development programmes. Female literacy is hardly 4.5%. After years of Community Development very little could be done for women and children. Mahila Samitis too failed because women were in seclusion. But when help was needed for pregnant women and nursing mothers the response was immediate. The natural sympathy for the expectant mother was exploited and an expanded programme of nutrition was possible. Today there are over 1600 Mahila Samitis with 16,600 members who run craft and literacy centres etc. It is always difficult to persuade rural communities, especially rural women, to accept health and adult education programmes without an economic content. A successful economic programme gives them a sense of achievement and gives tangible shape to their concern for general welfare. I have seen this among illiterate women Panchayat members, whose sense of responsibility has a healthy influence on village life and institutions.

(2) Whether it is literacy, family planning or community development, the programme would succeed if initiated by the persons concerned. In other words there must be motivation when people know what they need, and devise plans to satisfy it they rise above their own interests. This they will never do if imposed upon from above. It is here that we have to seek the help of voluntary organisations and activate them with substantial assistance. It is the voluntary organisation that pioneers new experiments; acts as an advanced guard. Administration consolidates, universalises and standardises the ventures of faith. Thousands of social welfare legislative enactments all over the civilised world bear witness to this fact.

(3) Any programme which ignores women is bound to fail. Their role in rural communities is overwhelmingly important. They are associated with agriculture in all its processes; besides, they have the important task of running the home, rearing the children and harmonising conflicting opinions and attitudes. We have to think of her as a composite of various roles as housewife, farmer, worker in the field, daily wage earner, cottage or small scale industry worker, self-labourer, unemployed or underemployed individual. And no social change can be dreamed of without the co-operation of women to abrogate the time-honoured customs which perpetuate social injustice and economic backwardness, sustain beliefs which make the acceptance of new ideas and rational thinking altogether difficult. Thus we come to the conclusion (1) that any programme of adult education for rural areas, be it social or political, must have an economic content of immediate interest and advantage; (2) the

programme should as far as possible be initiated by the people concerned to meet an urgent and felt need, and (3) women should be associated with these in all fields of activity. Rural community life should be viewed as an integrated whole and community activities should be regarded as common activities of all persons.

16. Although since 1955 women are being employed as Gram sevikas, craft teachers, health visitors and midwives, their impact has been very much limited as they are regarded as a new set of officers sent by the government. The motivation to raise the standard of living or fight social evils or initiate programmes for social change is yet to be developed. This can come only as the result of education and the realisation that a better life is possible through new techniques and new knowledge. The thick walls of prejudice will yield only to a multi-pronged attack as the foundations lie deep in the traditions, beliefs and faith of generations of men and women. All the same a silent revolution is taking place. Rural communities are no longer isolated units. The radio, the story-teller, the political propagandist, the election campaigns have begun. The first step to walk the mile has been taken but many more steps are needed to reach the goal. Here we pause for a minute to see what happens to the village when its isolation is broken by a new road, or a bus transport which links it with the world. Life changes, people begin to travel to work in nearby towns. They see new things, officials and tradesmen, entrepreneurs and others come into the village, a primary health centre appears, a doctor visits, newspapers are delivered, manufactured articles come, politicians come seeking votes, radio, refrigeration, electricity - all these undermine traditional values by introducing new kinds of music, drama, new political beliefs.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING APPROPRIATE TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

17. Rural communities have their traditional arts and crafts which have made these communities basically self-sufficient. Spinning and weaving, pottery, utensils for daily use in the home and for worship, woodwork, agricultural implements etc. were made locally and consumed locally. Rural crafts flourished in the past because of the local need. Rural arts and crafts provided a rich experience of self-expression and creativity. They gave the craftsman a sense and pride of achievement, self-confidence, mastery of techniques - the craftsman shared his

tools with others, people of different creeds learnt to work together, to appreciate the strength and tolerate the weakness of one another - co-operation naturally generates tolerance and a spirit of understanding so essential for social harmony. Today machine-made goods have taken the place of handicrafts and traditional skills do not receive much encouragement. Articles which were in daily use once upon a time have become or are fast becoming curios for the visiting tourists. Bell metal, brass and copper utensils are now used for decoration in the homes of the wealthy and cheap and ugly factory-made things have taken their place even in the rural homes.

18. When we talk of vocational training appropriate to rural communities we are unconsciously committing ourselves to two things. (1) We assume that rural communities are likely to remain rural for all time and (2) there are certain vocations which are fundamentally rural and special training is necessary to develop and increase their competence. These assumptions are the result of our habit of regarding rural communities as somewhat different and therefore claiming different treatment. The vocations we associate with rural communities are those which have been practised from time immemorial and which need improved techniques and training to be economically remunerative and effective. The object of vocational training in rural areas should be twofold. It should awaken the community to a sense of self-reliance and it should increase the competence in the practice of traditional arts and crafts by means of modern techniques. Rural industries are in the doldrums as they are unable to compete with factory-made goods. Unless rural development takes place rapidly and in a planned manner there is little hope of training rural youth for the vocations. Today most of the persons employed in rural work come from cities just as most of the persons employed in urban areas have rural background. It is a two way traffic in which the disadvantage is all on the rural side. The deserted village is not a new phenomenon, vocational training is needed to arrest the influx of rural population to urban areas abandoning their heritage, literally for a mess of potage. The reason is not far to seek.

19. What pushes the rural youth to the city is not merely the desire for change of residence. He feels that the only way to compensate the denials he has to face by living in the village is to migrate to the city where he expects to find new opportunities of education and employment which are not available in his own community, Hence it is necessary that the vocations chosen for training should be both remuneratively attractive and

psychologically satisfying. They must lessen the pull towards the cities. Financially and otherwise cities offer attractive prospects and since money has become the measure of all values and it is more plentiful in the cities than in rural communities the pull towards the cities is undeniably strong and irresistible. Normally craftsmen receive little encouragement from their clientele who are now no more his immediate neighbours and whose needs they are not familiar with. When the village craftsman shows some originality or genius his talents are exploited by middlemen who make capital out of his poverty and ignorance of the world at large. The modern craze for curios, the possession of which is also a status symbol, has not helped the rural craftsman as much as the middleman who by advancing him capital keeps him in perpetual bondage. There is a great spurt in the trade in handicrafts and unless marketing facilities are organised on a co-operative basis the present exploitation will continue and any training to increase the competence of the rural craftsman will not help him much.

20. Dissemination of knowledge regarding market conditions will be of considerable help. Forums like the farmers' forum with discussions on the scope and value of rural industries, the need to improve by training, by the adaptation of modern techniques, will remedy some of the existing disadvantages. Such a programme will necessarily mitigate the evils of divided families, urban slums, overcrowding and all other ancillary problems. Rural talent is suppressed by poverty and exploited by the urban middleman. In order to benefit by training, poverty has to be eradicated and in order to eradicate poverty vocational competence has to be increased. Training should help vocational mobility, and with the rapid spread of technical knowledge change of occupation should be easily possible. The rural community is governed by a system of personal relationships based on vocation which is the caste system. Technical competence should help to break this hide-bound system and also break the barrier between rural and urban India.

CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL NEEDS OF RURAL COMMUNITIES:

21. In India rural communities live in an atmosphere of rich cultural tradition and intellectual poverty. This tradition is characterised by tolerance, faith and understanding. It expresses itself in the observance of festivals, social events, pilgrimages, baths in the sacred rivers, visits to places of

worship. Differences in religious beliefs hardly count. Folk dance, song and drama, bhajan mandlis and story telling based on the epics recall the great national events, acts of courage and sacrifice, fearlessness in doing what is right, protection of the weak by the strong, reminding the listeners the duties of leaders, the discipline of the followers, the need for obedience, tolerance and a thousand other things without which it will not be possible for different people following different faiths to live together. Religion supplies both spiritual guidance and intellectual pabulum. Activities be they dance drama or pilgrimages, are group activities. They offer an outlet for rural talent, provide recreation for the community and also endeavour to inculcate the values of tolerance, truth, faith, etc. These traditions deserve to be preserved and saved from the influx of crude and vulgar films and literature which are fast moving towards our rural areas. There is also the danger that soon participants will become mere spectators.

22. Community life anywhere is controlled by social tradition and cultural inheritance. The accumulated skills, knowledge and wisdom are passed from generation to generation, not through books or formal education but through the art of living. Although great improvements are made in the art of living by the perpetuation of skills and crafts and have enabled the communities to overcome the limitations of environment, today they are faced with the challenge of science and technology which rural communities must meet.

23. In the rural community departure from custom is usually looked upon as a social crime; yet the custom may not be good for healthy development or progress, e.g. child marriage, seclusion of women. They may also have been the result of mistaken judgment or perpetuation of something which has no meaning today like dowry, ostentatious wedding lasting for days, funerals. Social customs are the result of social living and perpetuate the harmful and the helpful together. Even today ethics have a great hold on rural communities and leadership belongs to him who is honest, sincere and selfless. These values are being assailed by the emphasis on physical well-being as the ultimate goal of life and the elimination of poverty as the panacea for all social ills. In this process there is the lurking danger of urban corruption setting in and the soul being lost.

24. Before the invasion of government and technology in rural areas the communities were not only self-sufficient but their personal, social, religious, educational and aesthetic

needs were integrated. There was general participation. Group activities formed the life of the community. Government intervention has not been all to the good and to the extent government intervenes, community life is impoverished.

25. Today, more than at any other time in the history of mankind, no community can live in isolation uninfluenced by external contacts and pressures. But these need not necessarily lead to the fading of community identity. Introduction of mechanised agriculture, opportunities for vocational training, pursuit of the ideal of universal literacy, will rouse the intellectual curiosity and needs of the rural people. Provision of libraries, vigyan mandirs, rural institutes, can be combined with the revival and encouragement of healthy social and cultural traditions of the communities. Many people feel that the rural communities should not be judged by the affluent standards of the cities and the values they share and hold dear should by no means be allowed to decay. A great community is not a vision or realisation of material wealth. Important as it is, it is not the vision of community living together and the realisation that man does not live by bread alone, that have made people and communities great. There must be scope for the cultivation of the spirit. Let us not mistake contentment for placidity or appreciation of moral values for conservatism. What is needed now and forever is not the vain search for change of circumstances which draws people away from their home and country to centres of power, corruption and luxury but an endeavour to achieve a change of spirit and attitude.

26. Cultural disintegration is always marked by a decline in the number of group activities. It is said that "people do not live together simply to be together, they live together to do something together". Benjamin Franklin put it differently "It is hard for an empty sack to stand upright". The self-reliance and autonomy of community can be maintained when they are knit together by common needs and common participation in group activities. In our rural communities there is still the attitude of general sharing of opportunity and responsibility encouraged now by the establishment of Panchayati Raj. The feeling of interdependence makes co-operation a necessity and men may thus rise above their own selves. It is said that human nature does not change but when nations and men accept the same goals, the same rules and the same institutions, their behaviour towards each other is bound to change. In the thousands of communities living in India a change of behaviour is indicated as a result of the impact of modern technology. Adult education must see to it

that the culture of the cities does not lead to the disintegration and ruin of the culture of the rural communities. Preservation of aesthetic and moral values should go a hand in hand with the development of technical competence and vocational training.

THE ROLE OF LITERACY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

27. Literacy is often regarded as the sixth sense as it opens up the vast field of education and self-development. Illiteracy generates feeling of inferiority and militates against social equality on the foundation of which the edifice of local government is built. Literacy helps adults to acquire vocational skills and professional competence. Earlier I referred to the impossibility of achieving total literacy in the immediate future; yet without it exchange of experience, knowledge by study and the continuous process of self-education will be very difficult. Studies have proved the correlation between modernisation with access to the media of communication. They have shown that access to the printed page and radio have helped to develop modern attitudes. They have also shown that attitudes that are highly meaningful to people are seldom changed by the mass media alone. An experiment conducted in India to measure the adoption by farmers of new agricultural practices proved that mass media may produce action in some, may not in others. It needed media plus ability to read and personal discussion.

28. In India as well as in other countries similarly placed several attempts are made by means of conscription for literacy and through voluntary agencies to spread literacy in rural areas. I have in my mind the efforts made in Iran and Indonesia, where through government efforts by conscription and through voluntary efforts respectively, literacy is boosted up and target dates are fixed for the total elimination of illiteracy. Employers and trade unionists would do well to follow the example of countries like Guatemala to see that their members are made literate without the help of the State. In Mali we are told that more than 2000 volunteers from all walks of life, teachers, young people, women, trade unionists and soldiers have been engaged in literacy work. In India there was a spurt of voluntary activities in this direction during the late thirties and although even now there are organisations doing literacy work there is no nation-wide effort to reach total literacy. It is a self evident fact that literacy programmes help to boost production both on the farm and in the factory. Literacy programmes have helped farmers to understand modern techniques of agricultural production. Ability to

read figures on the weighing machine, the labels on the tools, posters regarding seeds and fertilizers, has led to economy both in management and greater efficiency and increase in production. For parents the ability to sign their names, record birth dates, read letters sent by their children, know what their children are reading, remove the inferiority complex which has been responsible for many of our social ills.

29. Nobody regards literacy as an end in itself. It is a means not only to self-development but also a means of eradicating social injustice. Can there be a greater deprivation than the denial of education which in my opinion is the worst form of discrimination? We are told that in India even those who have had a year or two of schooling lapse into illiteracy for want of follow-up literacy work. In certain areas the lapse is as high as 60% within one year of enrolment. Libraries, community centres, reading rooms, radio clubs and listening groups are meant to help the literate to remain literate. Community Development blocks, Home Science Extension wings etc. concentrate more on adult education for better agricultural development and raising the standard of living, than on literacy work.

30. It is necessary to remember that no learning takes place in the absence of motivation. Motivation comes only when learning is purposeful. The moment the rural community feels that literacy is helpful in improving its prospects it will opt for it without any external pressure. Once in Bihar when I asked a farmer why he had donated land for a school his reply was characteristic. Said he: "I am illiterate and I do not know the difference between a ten rupee and a hundred rupee note and I have been cheated many times. I do not want my son to be cheated in the same way hence I gave land to build a school."

31. Today various organisations, adult education societies, other voluntary organisations and individuals do literacy work. Even after receiving literacy certificates there is a likelihood of lapse into illiteracy if facilities and opportunities are not easily available for follow up work.

32. There is growing realisation that literacy for women is more important and imperative than for men. A change in the values of life and goals for the coming generation could be brought about effectively through the mothers in home. Ignorance and illiteracy of women constitute one of the major obstacles to social progress. Therefore "the problem of achievement of literacy is the first step not only to civilised life in general but

a very urgent and a very important step for economic development".

33. Rapid industrialisation and independence have revolutionised the status of women in India. Women are sharing responsibilities in all fields of national life and endeavour. This means increasing need for education. Progress of women's education has been very slow and the disparity between boys and girls in the matter of literacy reflects the extent of prejudice and discrimination that still exist in our rural areas. However a new realisation is growing that girls' education is closely related to their role as mothers and citizens and the task of training the rising generation.