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SOME PERSPECTIVES ON NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

by
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I am grateful to the authorities of the Indian Adult Education Association, and particularly to its President, Dr. Malcolm S. Adiseshiah, for inviting me to deliver the Zakir Husain Memorial Lecture this year. It is a great privilege of which I shall always feel proud, especially because I was lucky enough to have known and worked close to Zakirsab for over 25 years. I am not sure, however, that I deserve this honour; and I should be pardoned if what I say is not worthy of the great philosopher and educationist after whom these lectures are named.

I shall speak on Some Perspectives on Non-Formal Education in India. Non-formal education, as you are all aware, is the latest arrival on the Indian educational scene where new arrivals are by no means infrequent. As generally happens in the case of all ‘new’ arrivals, it is having a mixed reception and has already begun to mean many things to many groups and individuals. In a situation of this type, I thought that it would be an advantage to set down, somewhat comprehensively, the different perspectives on the programme in the Indian situation. This will help to clarify its basic assumptions and concepts, methodologies of organization, and potentials and limitations.

Three Channels of Education

Let me begin with a brief comment on the three channels of education: Formal, Non-Formal and Incidental.

‘Formal’ education is easiest to define: it means the education imparted in the formal system of education organized and supported by the State. It is equally easy to define ‘incidental’ education which means all that one learns as a concomitant of growing up in a society. For instance, a child learns bodily control, language, social etiquette and manners
or acquires a value system while growing up in his home. This learning process is continued outside the home as well as in later life when he learns from his contacts with his playmates, peers, friends or co-workers, participates in social activities and programmes, enters upon a career, marries and brings up children, travels, plays or fights. Incidental education is, therefore, entirely dependent on the home and the society which are educational institutions in themselves. But it is not specifically organized like formal education and is just what happens to an individual who lives in a society. ‘Non-formal’ education is, therefore, to be distinguished from formal education on the one hand and incidental education on the other. It differs from formal education in the sense that it takes place outside the formal school system (although this characteristic is shared by incidental education as well). It also differs from incidental education in that it is organized (which incidental education is not). I am not happy with the word ‘non-formal’, partly because it is a negative phrase (all negative definitions are always unsatisfactory), and partly because it would even cover incidental education (which also is not formal). But the wisdom of the English language has decided to use the simplified expression ‘non-formal education’ to stand for a more precise but awkward expression: ‘non-formal and non-incidental education’. I acquiesce in and accept the usage for the convenience it provides, and especially because I have no better alternative to suggest.

Definitions are a tricky affair; and one is often compelled to modify them even as they are being formulated. I find myself in the same predicament and must warn that these three categories are not totally exclusive of each other. For instance, there could be channels of non-formal education within the formal system itself (e.g., correspondence education or extra mural activities of universities). Sometimes, the formal system utilizes the channels of non-formal education to fortify or supplement its own programmes (e.g., use of radio or TV for school education). Moreover, every school is a community of a kind and a good deal of incidental education always goes on within the school itself. Not infrequently, the school itself becomes a formal community (e.g., a university campus where teachers and students live together) and the incidental education which such a community provides becomes even more important and effective than what happens in its class-rooms. Similarly, the line between non-formal education (which is organized but outside the formal school) and incidental education (which is also outside the formal school but unorganized) is not always easy to draw. For instance, the way is which a girl learns home-craft and child-rearing or a son learns the craft of his father, or a young man learns music by becoming the student of a reputed singer, is not just incidental education: there is a strong social tradition behind it which compels it to happen and a good deal of organized effort. Such forms of incidental education are, therefore, almost non-formal or semi-formal if we so choose to designate them. But such overlap apart, it is usually no problem to distinguish between formal, non-formal and incidental education and to deal with them as distinct entities.

Before concluding this definitional discussion I would like to clarify two issues. The total educational process which a society needs must include all the three channels of education—formal, non-formal and incidental, and Education of a society, I would prefer to call it ‘Education’ with a capital ‘E’, is the total integrated effect of all the three channels, each of which has its own distinctive role to play. I must also emphasize that every individual receives his education in all the three channels; and although the relative quantum and significance of each of these channels in one’s life may vary from individual to individual, it is essential for every individual to expose himself to all the three channels for a complete education. In a situation of this type, it is wrong to indulge in the amateurish exercise of denigrating one channel or exalting another. Each channel has its own strengths and weaknesses and its own potential and limitations; and what we should be most concerned with is to make the best use of every channel, socially as well as individually.

A Brief Historical Perspective

I began by saying that non-formal education was the latest arrival on the Indian educational scene. What I meant was
that Indian educationists have started talking of non-formal education only very recently. I did not mean that non-formal education was new to India. In fact, both non-formal and incidental education are extremely old and if anything, it is formal education that arrived last on the educational scene in India, as in every other country. To set the perspectives right, therefore, it is essential to take a bird’s eye-view of their origin and development.

In the very simple primitive tribal societies that we had in India at the dawn of civilization, incidental education was the only known or available channel. Children and youth learnt by living and participating in the activities of the home and society. It was not education for living but education through living; and there was no difference between the process of socialization and education.

Gradually, as the quantum of available knowledge began to increase and the need for specialized skills began to grow, some persons began to specialize in certain skills (e.g., men specialized in fighting, fishing, hunting or medicine and women specialized in cooking, agriculture, child-care and mid-wifery). This led to forms of education which stand mid-way between incidental and non-formal education, e.g., individual children or young persons learning essential skills through apprenticeship to a member of the family or some other suitable person outside it. Later on, some regular forms of non-formal education also came to be organized, e.g., a Ghotul for young persons among the Muria Gonds. These were not formal schools but they did perform certain specific educational functions which neither the home nor the society did. At this stage of development, therefore, the formal school had not yet been born; and education merely consisted of these incidental, semi-non-formal (or early non-formal) channels.*

Even in the ancient period the society in India grew in size, became more complex, developed a fairly high degree of specialization, and gathered a considerable amount of knowledge the rate of growth of which was also accelerated to some extent. There was thus a need to create selected special groups as well as institutions for undertaking the responsibility to preserve, increase and disseminate the accumulated knowledge of the people. The literary castes thus came into existence and the formal school was born and grew slowly to a respectable size. Ancient India was in fact known for its universities which attracted students from all over the world as then known. The same trend continued in the middle ages as well; and when the Muslims came, their own system of formal education was added to the earlier Hindu institutions. By the end of the nineteenth century, a formal system of education, mostly supported by the community had come into existence in all parts of the country. Side by side, some changes had taken place in incidental and non-formal systems of education as well. The quality of incidental education necessarily depends upon the quality of life in the society; and as society changed to grow to higher levels, incidental education also underwent a corresponding change. The institutions of non-formal education also grew in variety and sophistication over the years. Two of these changes deserve special notice. As the religion-based formal system of higher learning was ascriptive and severely limited in access, the need to spread the message of religion among the masses was keenly felt. This led to the creation of the great oral tradition in India which spread to all the nooks and corners of the country and which, in a mutilated form, survives even to this day. The second was the rise of Akhadas or institutions of physical education and military training which trained young men, irrespective of caste, to a career in the army.

Some aspects of the educational situation at the end of the eighteenth century deserve special notice. The access to the formal system of education was ascriptive, mostly based on birth, and restricted to the literary and priestly castes or classes, well-to-do landlords, moneylenders and traders. The formal schools of higher learning had very limited access and
imparted a religion-based education. They conferred no economic or political rewards worth the name; but their students and teachers were highly respected in society. The formal elementary schools were utilitarian, taught the three R's and wherever necessary, the court language, and qualified some of their students for jobs under government or outside where such skills were in demand. Women hardly went to schools and even among men, the percentage of literacy was only about six. With this severe limitation on the coverage of the formal system of education, it goes without saying that most people were educated through non-formal or incidental channels. It must be pointed out, however, that this difference did not place the masses of people at any great disadvantage in comparison with the classes who received formal education. For one thing, the formal system of education had become stagnant while that of non-formal education was still vibrant. The social, economic and political rewards which the formal system offered were not large and the differences in life-styles of the educated and the uneducated were not very conspicuous. What is even more important, vertical mobility lay, not through the ascriptive channels of formal education, but through the more democratic non-formal channels of military training and a career in the army.

This situation has undergone an unbelievable change during the last 175 years. For instance, a modern system of formal education has been created and has grown to tremendous dimensions. It now has about 700,000 institutions of various types, about 100 million students, a teaching force of more than three million, and a total expenditure of about Rs. 25,000 million. The formal system of elementary education is not very different from that of the eighteenth century. But modern secondary and higher education is totally different from the old indigenous schools of higher learning and has enabled us to contribute to as well as to share all the growing knowledge in the world. It has modernized our elite groups that avail themselves of this education and made them citizens of an international community. It has also enabled us to create a large force of highly trained scientific and technological man-power which ranks third in the world in size and

which, apart from helping to modernize our economy and administration, is also helping several other developing countries to modernize themselves. The system has been given a monopoly to certify intellectual achievements and it has become a ladder which helps the ambitious to climb to privilege because it is only through successful performance within it that one can rise to important positions in any walk of life. As its portals have been thrown open to all individuals irrespective of caste, sex, or religion, it has also become the most significant channel of vertical mobility. It may also be stated that, during this period, several new channels of non-formal education have also been developed. For instance, a modern press has been built up in the country, both in English and in the Indian languages. Libraries have been established and are progressively being developed. The radio has now reached every village and a network of TV is being gradually spread. The programmes of agricultural extension and of family planning are examples of modern non-formal channels developed for the masses.

All this is good and commendable no doubt. But the system has several weaknesses as well, both quantitative and qualitative. Among its qualitative weaknesses, mention may be made of its divorce from work and development so that it has no strong relationship either with productivity or with national needs and aspirations. On the quantitative side, the main weakness of the system is that its benefits reach only a minority of the population. Secondary and higher education, which alone enable a person to avail himself of the economic and political rewards which the system provides, are being availed of by only 10 per cent of the age-group 15-25; and of these, as many as eight come from the upper 20 per cent of the population and only as few as two come from the lower 80 per cent of the population. The very fact that 60 per cent of the population above the age of 10 is still illiterate shows that even the meagre benefits of primary education are available only to a minority. The same is true of the modern channels of non-formal education as well. Press and the library system have no meaning for the illiterate masses. The educational content of the radio is very limited and the TV is
still available only to the metropolitan elite. Even agricultural extension mostly benefits the rich farmers.

It is, therefore, no surprise that, even today, the vast masses of people are still educated through the traditional forms of non-formal and incidental education. It is indeed an eye-opener to find how little has been the impact of formal education on the life of the masses, especially in the rural areas. A survey I conducted from this point of view in a small group of villages showed that the working members of the society had learnt most of the useful skills they had acquired through non-formal and incidental education. For instance, all women had learnt home-making and child-care outside the school system; all agriculturists had learnt their profession by actual doing and the same was true of all artisans such as barbers, tailors, washermen, dais, tanners, carpenters, blacksmiths, or bricklayers. In fact, the only educated people in this community were the government servants and a few well-to-do 'leaders' who exploited the people. The results of this sad situation are obvious. The masses have remained poor, traditional and feudal mainly because they are still being educated through the outdated and non-formal educational channels of the eighteenth century which gives them their value systems, their superstitious beliefs, their limited and often obsolete knowledge and their traditional limited skills. This is why our society, as a whole, is changing so slowly, in spite of the fairly rapid modernization of the elite groups. A large chasm has thus developed between the well-to-do, modernized elite groups which are the almost exclusive beneficiaries of the modern system of formal education as well as of the modern channels of non-formal education, and the poor and traditional masses who are still receiving their education through the old traditional forms of non-formal and incidental education. This chasm is far wider than that which separated the educated elite from the uneducated masses at the end of the eighteenth century for the simple reason that the economic, political and social rewards of the modern educational system are far greater than those of the formal educational system of the eighteenth century and the introduction of modern science and technology has created a tremendous difference between the life-styles of the well-to-do educated individuals and those of the poor, uneducated masses.

Challenges for Non-Formal Education

It is at this point in our educational development that we have begun to discuss the concept and programmes of non-formal education. The challenges for the system of non-formal education which we propose to evolve over the next few years must, therefore, arise from an analysis of this very situation. Let me, for purposes of today's discussion, mention two of these major challenges.

(1) Our historical analysis has shown that the central issue in Indian society is the education and standard of living of the masses. There is no problem about the small crust of the ruling classes at the top: they have always had the best of education, controlled the bulk of the resources of the country and enjoyed social, economic and political privileges. But the masses of this country have always remained poor, unorganized and weak and have been educated almost exclusively through traditional non-formal and incidental channels. If we have to create an egalitarian society, the masses must be educated and organized so that they have their due share of power and are enabled to improve their standard of living. This is the basic challenge in national education and development.

(2) In spite of all its positive features and advantages, the system of formal education also suffers from several major weaknesses. For instance, as mentioned earlier it is divorced from work and development and has grown into a huge monolithic structure with a tremendous inertia and emphasis on rigidity and conformity. It, therefore, resists all attempts at change like the new toy which has recently come into the market. It is a beautiful rectangular box with an electric switch which is turned 'off'. The moment you turn it 'on', musical sounds begin to emerge from the box, its lid opens, a hand comes out, turns the switch 'off' and gets into the box, the lid is closed, the music ceases and we again go back to square one. The transformation of this education system into an elastic and dynamic one, built round work and development, is yet another challenge which we have to face.
A close examination of even these two basic challenges will show that the programmes of non-formal education have an important role to play in educational and social transformation which must go hand in hand. I affirm this because non-formal education can help us to:

- educate the masses, conscientize and organize them so that they are enabled to improve their standards of living;
- make work and development the core of the educational process and speed up national progress;
- extend the benefits of the formal system of education to all the people and especially to those who do not benefit therefrom at present;
- help to improve the formal system of education itself and make it elastic and dynamic; and
- assist in raising the level and quality of incidental education as well.

I shall now proceed to discuss each of these programmes in some detail.

Modernization of Non-Formal Education

When educationists and administrators discuss the problem of developing non-formal education programmes for the masses, I wonder if they realize that the masses have had nothing but non-formal education throughout the centuries. What they need, therefore, is not more non-formal education of the traditional type, but the modernization of their non-formal education programmes. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, both the formal education system meant for the select few, as well as the non-formal education programmes meant for the masses, were traditional. During the last 150 years, the formal system of education for the select few was thoroughly modernized which has, in its turn, modernized the elite groups. On the other hand, the non-formal education programmes meant for the people continue to be traditional and consequently, the masses still continue to live the same traditional life of the old days. What we need, therefore, is not just more of any non-formal education, but the large scale development of modern programmes of non-formal education. It is both a qualitative and a quantitative programme and its qualitative aspects are far more significant than the quantitative ones.

The traditional programmes of non-formal education have three main weaknesses. They are intended to continue the status quo and to educate every individual to his status in society. They are also not based on science and technology so that they tend to perpetuate outmoded technologies of the earlier days, obsolete beliefs and superstitions, and resistance to change. Besides, both the teachers and students in these programmes are the illiterate traditional individuals from the masses themselves who perform the task of imparting their knowledge, skills and beliefs to one another. This is therefore, a game where the blind lead the blind. If these programmes are to be modernized, three main changes must take place. To begin with, these programmes of non-formal education will have to be developed by persons educated in the formal system who can act as agents of modernization. Secondly, they must have a large basic content of science and technology. It is science that will help to dispel fear, to eradicate superstition, to inhibit fatalism and to increase self-reliance. It is modern technology that will help the people to increase their productivity and to raise their standard of living. Thirdly, the object of these new programmes is not to train each individual to his own status in society but to conscientize him, to make him aware of himself, of his proper role and status in society, of the entire social reality, and of the manner in which it can be transformed to create a new egalitarian order. It is really education for liberation and not education for perpetuation of bondage. The work and philosophy of Paolo Freire is very relevant in this context. So are the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi who emphasized that political education must be an integral part of the education of adults and that it must give them the wisdom and the courage to fight all injustice and wrongs at any cost through the peaceful and non-violent methods of satyagraha. These are the new elements that the
traditional forms of non-formal education lack and which the modernized form of non-formal education must provide.

**Work and Development : The Core of Non-Formal Education Programmes**

It is equally important to build the modern programmes of non-formal education round work and development. It is unfortunate that our formal system of education was originally intended for the literary castes of India who looked down upon manual labour and were never involved in any processes of direct production. Consequently, it was totally divorced from work and this divorce still continues to dominate the system. Mahatma Gandhi highlighted this weakness of the system and pointed out that work and education are integrally related and that education can be best conveyed through the medium of work. This is why he enunciated his scheme of basic education where he tried to introduce work in the formal school system. The problem in non-formal education is somewhat different. Here, we are not required to put work into education (because most of the educands in non-formal education are already working) but to build education round work (because what these persons need is education which will give a meaning to the work that they are doing and will help to improve their efficiency and earnings). But whether we introduce work in the formal school system or build education round work in the non-formal education programmes, the basic principle is the same Gandhian maxim: work without education is a mechanical drudgery and education without work is a perpetuation of parasitism, exploitation and violence. All non-formal education programmes must, therefore, be integrally related to some form or other of socially useful productive work.

In the same way, non-formal education must also be integrated with development in the sense that it must involve the people actively in programmes of social and national development. Unfortunately we have taken a managerial view of development so far, i.e., development is something which the people receive passively and which is created for them by some other managerial groups such as the bureaucracy or the voluntary social workers. It is not denied that change agents have a significant role to play in social transformation. But the transformation never takes place until the people themselves are deeply involved in the change process. Modern programmes of non-formal education must, therefore, involve the people themselves actively in bringing about social changes. In fact, their basic aim is to change people rather than deliver some pre-determined targets. They should, therefore, be closely related to all programmes of change and development. In fact, a good motto for non-formal education is: education through reconstruction and reconstruction through education. On the one hand, non-formal education accelerates and effectively implements the programmes of development; on the other hand, it is development which provides the materials for non-formal education to grow to its proper stature and to achieve its objectives.

**Extending the Coverage of the Formal System of Education**

I have pointed out that the coverage of the formal system of education is very limited: it excludes all workers by its insistence on full-time attendance; and it also excludes all poor persons who cannot afford the expenditure it involves. Since the costs of formal education are high, we do not have the resources to bring all persons under the formal system of education. It is not also a question of money only, because formal education, which posits a dichotomy between work and education, can never bring all workers to school or provide life-long education. It is in this predicament that non-formal education has a major role to play. At the preschool stage, it is possible to organize community resources in women, money and materials and to provide non-formal preschool education to a far larger proportion of children than we can ever hope to do on the traditional formal lines. At the elementary stage, non-formal approaches can provide good part-time education to those children who drop out of schools because they are required to work in or outside the family. It can thus reduce wastage and help us to provide universal education to all children in the age-group 6-14 at a cost which we can afford. In the age-group 15-25, only about 10 per cent are enrolled in secondary schools and colleges. The remaining 90 per cent
are really the nation and they have no access to any formal education at present. Programmes of non-formal education can involve all of them in achieving personal growth and helping national progress. Among the adults, non-formal education can help to liquidate illiteracy, to provide citizenship education, and to promote national development through personal and group involvement. In short, it is only non-formal education that can help us to surmount the inherent limitations of the formal system and provide life-long education for all. These programmes are now so well-known and so generally accepted that I need not elaborate them any further.

Qualitative Improvement of Formal Education

There is a good deal of qualitative improvement needed in formal education. But one does not know how to bring it about. The system has grown to such huge dimensions and has become such a rigid monolith: structure that an immense amount of energy and money is needed to bring about the desired change. We do not seem to have this energy, nor can we afford this cost even now. As time passes, the size and rigidity of the system grows so that the cost and energy required to change the system increases, even as our ability to attempt it appears to become less and less.

Non-formal education, if developed properly and on a large scale, can provide a solution to this intricate problem. The development of modern programmes of non-formal education, where we start almost from scratch, can be planned on the principles of elasticity and dynamism. In fact, they have no chance of success unless they are so planned. Non-formal education will have to be interesting and useful to the students because we cannot have captive audiences. It will have to be built round work because the educands are mostly workers and it will have to involve its students in development because it is directed to bring about social change. Its methods of teaching will have to be dynamic and its materials significantly produced in the languages of the people. In other words, non-formal education will give us a good opportunity to bring about the desired educational reforms; and it will be possible to bring them about because of the newness and comparatively small scale of the programme in the early years. But once this experience is gained, it can be of immense use in changing the formal education system itself. In 1921, Gandhiji advised teachers and students to leave the official system of education and to establish a national system of education outside it so that eventually, the entire official system could be nationalized. The basic idea was that the movement for the reform of the official education system should begin outside it, and should be developed to such a magnitude, that it can be used to capture and reform the official system itself. This effort did not succeed for several reasons, the principal one being that the national schools were too few to make any tangible impact on the society. But if we learn from the errors of this experiment and develop non-formal education in a big way, there is no doubt that we shall be training the personnel and gaining the valuable experience which will enable us to reform the formal system of education itself in the long run.

Raising the Level of Incidental Education Itself

The level of incidental education depends on that of the society or the home which provides it. For instance the incidental education which a child gets in a city like Delhi is infinitely different than what a child born in the forests of Orissa can have. Similarly, the incidental education which a child of an IAS Officer gets at home is vastly different from that of a child born in the family of a landless agricultural labourer in the same place. But incidental education has an important role to play, especially in the inculcation of values. Its significance is specially great at the preschool stage because it is almost the only education which a child then has, and if the Freidians are to be believed, the basic contours of an individual’s personality are already formed when he is about six years old. There is no doubt, therefore, that we must strive to improve the incidental education which the children of the masses get. In this, the programmes of non-formal education of the parents and raising the standard of living of the people will have a major role to play.

Essential Conditions for Success

I have so far described the principal programmes of non-formal education which we must develop in the near future to
correct the weaknesses of the formal system of education, to educate and organize the masses and to improve their standard of living, and ultimately to create an egalitarian social order. Before I close, I shall say a few words about the conditions essential for the success of these programmes.

The first is a question of basic philosophy: our faith in the common man of India and his potential. To many a person from the intelligentsia, the poor in India appear to be an unnecessary evil, an irrelevance to be thrown out, an inconvenient presence which is better put out of sight and out of mind and a pest that is better not born. No programmes of non-formal education for the masses can grow out of such an attitude. We must, therefore, develop, not only compassion for, but also a faith in the poor man of India. He is really the nation and the future of the country depends more upon him than upon the minority of the educated elite. The more widespread this faith becomes, the greater is the possibility of success in programmes of non-formal education.

The second is a question of status and quality. Non-formal education should not be looked upon as education for other people's children or for people of no significance. It has to be given a status equivalent to that of formal education, if not better. This can happen only if its quality is maintained at the highest level, if proper bridges are built between it and the formal system of education at appropriate points, and the economic, political and social rewards of non-formal education are made comparable to those of the formal system.

The third is a question of scale: modern programmes of non-formal education are meant for the vast majority of our people. They will, therefore, have to be developed in a very big way and their coverage would have to be even larger than that of the formal system. Running a few schools or centres, however good, will not serve the purpose; and if an effective dent is to be made on the situation, programmes of non-formal education would have to be developed on a very massive scale.

The fourth is a question of investment. It will not be possible to develop the programmes of non-formal education on the large scale required and to maintain their quality unless the nation is prepared to invest in them on an equally massive scale. It may not be possible to raise all the resources required for non-formal education if the formal system of education is also allowed simultaneously to grow and consume additional resources. In such an eventuality, there should be no hesitation to go slow with the further extension of the formal system of education (because more than 60 per cent of the resources invested therein go down the drain) and to divert the bulk of additional resources available to the development of the programmes of non-formal education.

The fifth and the last question refers to the investment of human resources. Money is never the most important investment in education. What the learners invest therein, a large proportion of their entire life, is a priceless and unparalleled investment. What they get out of it will depend very largely on the extent to which we invest the time of our most talented and committed persons for the development of educational programmes. The success and quality of the programmes of non-formal education will, therefore, ultimately depend upon the extent to which our talented young men and women find it worthwhile to commit themselves to its development in the service of the poor man of India.

These observations mainly show what the proper development of non-formal education needs, and what we should do for it. But let me conclude by referring to one thing which we should not do, viz., to treat it as cavalierly as we have treated all its precursors on the educational scene. Let us not forget that the education of the poor masses of India has been a problem that has engaged us for nearly a hundred years. From this point of view, Dadabhau Naoroji put forward, as early as in 1881, a programme of universal primary education of four years duration for all children. We accepted it. We then found it to be too plebeian and decided to provide good education to all children till they reach the age of 14 years. Even this was found to be unsatisfactory and some of us are already talking of amending the Constitution to provide universal education till the age of 16 or even 18. But while
our objectives are soaring high on paper, we will not have provided even four years education to all children by 1981 when the Centenary of Dadabhai Naoroji’s demand may have to be celebrated. The second programme of mass education, viz., the universal education of adults, was also started very early. In the thirties of this century, people were not ashamed to call it literacy and to talk of liquidation of the illiteracy of the masses. But we soon began to think that mere literacy was not enough, and decided to develop programmes of adult education. Having soon discovered that adult education cannot be divorced from the attempt to bring about social change, we rechristened it as social education; and to familiarize the people with the new terminology, used the expression ‘Social (Adult) Education’ as a transitional measure. For a time, we also toyed with the concepts of ‘functional literacy’ and ‘fundamental education’. We have now forgotten all this and have suddenly discovered non-formal education; and as a transitional measure, we have already set up a Directorate of Non-Formal (Adult) Education. While I do not doubt the conceptual progress involved in all this transition from ‘literacy’ to ‘non-formal education’ I cannot help pointing out that very little has happened on the ground during all these years, that 60 per cent of our people are still illiterate and that their absolute numbers are still increasing.

The programmes of mass education in India, be they in the field of universal elementary education or universal adult education, have generally languished in spite of all the talk in their favour and in spite of all the conceptual sophistication achieved. The reason is lack of adequate action: none of these programmes have been supported, throughout all these years, by deep political commitment, investment of adequate resources, and organization of a mass movement to implement them on an adequate scale. In dealing with this problem, therefore, one does not appear like a mature and responsible adult who sticks to his programme till he succeeds. On the other hand, one appears like a child who plays with a toy for a while, only to throw it away for another with a good colour, and still later for yet another with a more dazzling colour combination. What is needed is a radical change in these intrinscent attitudes. The deep-seated and intractable problems of mass poverty, ignorance and ill-health cannot be solved unless there is a firm political commitment, a massive investment of resources, and dedicated efforts of the intelligentsia. This is a task for all of us, the intelligentsia as well as the political leadership; and let me hope and pray that, now at least, we would all rise to the occasion.