## Open University and Women's Literacy

concepts are new in the country. These systems have emerged as an outgrowth of education by correspondence with help from electronic communications. Over the last two decades, opportunities for learning at a distance are expanding rapidly and distance education is becoming increasingly common in the developing countries. These countries, desperate to expand their educational systems to meet unprecedented demand for education due to rapid growth in population, consider distance education as a viable low-cost alternative and establish distance teaching

networks or institutions. Evidences show that the Distance Education (DE) in the developing countries, by and large, follow the Western models with emphasis on the use of self learning and audio-visual materials. Little attention is paid to few basic issues like (a) level of literacy (b) population distribution (c) access to media (d) traditional school system (e) resource constraints (f) convenience of target groups (g) academic control (h) tensions and conflicts in educational development and i) relevance of education to clientele's need etc. As a result, a number of distance education institutions in the developing countries are caught between the imposing demands and resource con straints, high expectations and low achievement.

Now how far the Bangladesh Open University (BOU) with all its prospects and problems will be able to promote female education and literacy? For women in Bangladesh, illiteracy, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, disease, unemployment go together. More than 80 per cent rural women do not have access to health, hygiene, employment and education.

Use of DE for promotion of 'iteracy among rural women is and will be difficult due to the fact that a person who has not learned how to read can not benefit from distance educa-

Further, traditional mode of DE techniques to deliver even traditional packages of literacy materials would be quite risky as it requires use of mass and electronic media while receiving end arrangements are least satisfactory. Costs involved are quite high and relevance to clienteles' need in terms of

tie, energy is expensive. Reference may be made to satellite programme on adult functional literacy in India, adult literacy programme of Pakistan using televised literacy lessons through a network of community viewing centres. Example of these two countries indicate a shortfall between target level and actual achievement. Various reports on the experiences of these two countries maintained that

had face-to-face tuition been

by Salma Akhter

people even after going to school on a compulsory basis, cannot read and write well enough to cope with living in the modern world. The UNESCO (1992) recently observed that functional illiteracy has become a matter of growing concern in a world where technological progress demands even higher levels of

Since Paulo Feire, under-Therefore, the decision to

For the women of Bangladesh, education in any form should be considered as a catalyst that would give her equality, economic power, justice and dignity she had long been denied. Evidences, studies, NGO activities unequivocally point to the positive impact of women's literacy and employment on fertility. children's health, nutritional status and quality of life. That is why women's literacy is considered to be a more sensitive index of social development than the overall literacy rate of a country.

the principal learning mode. success rate would have been much higher.

Hallak maintained that distance education had not been successful in combating illiter-

standing of literacy has progressed quite substantially. Literacy is neither confined to broadening of perception only. nor to a unified competency alone. It is rather complex.

literate women or girls through BOU needs, to be influenced by the perceived relwell as societal concern for a

cultural and human rights.

The possible application of

DE for promoting women's lit

eracy under the open univer-

sity would require to consider

contextual dimensions, cou

rses, programmes, learning

materials related to social, cul-

tural, economic, linguistic.

ethical heritages, beliefs and

values, demands and needs of

the area, community, group of

people or individual in the

evance of education to their as better life. Women, through



education need to be empowcred with information about safe water, sanitation, child care, nutrition, animal husbandry, modern agriculture, elementary and intermediate technology. If majority of the poor rural women are not to be marginalised forever, they also nced a basic grasp of irrigation, pumpsets, tubewells, farm machinery, elementary accountancy, rural marketing, distribution networks, banking and loan facilities, co-operative

practices. Women should also have to be aware of their legal and family rights which would protect them from desertion by husbands, multiple marriage of husband, divorce, dowry, vi olenée, dental from family as-

For the women of Bangladesh, education in any form should be considered as a catalyst that would give her equality, economic power, justice and dignity she had long been denied. Evidences, stud ies. NGO activities unequivocally point to the positive impact of women's literacy and employment on fertility, children's health, nutritional status and quality of life. That is why women's literacy is considered to be a more sensitive index of social development than the overall literacy rate of a country. But, not enough people, even amongst the educated urban population are aware of this correlation!

An integrated and holistic approach of education and litcracy is essential for the development of women. Now, the question is whether open university is and will be able to create such a model and environment in which women as a human-being can be valued and nurtured. An open university among its various departments and divisions, will have a women's education division. The designers, curriculum planners, programmers must create an educational environment and process which would enable women to seek literacy at a point when it is meaningful and valuable to them. The educational process must enable women to ask for literacy, to ask questions, seek answers, take action and reflect on actions. There is no point in teaching women to read and write unless they are given the hope of a better life. The Bangladesh Open

University, instead of treating women's literacy and basic ed ucation as a part of readymade packages for DE should create an independent structure to experiment with female literacy at the initial stage. If BOU is to develop integrated literacy programme, co-ordinate activities of hundreds of NGOs, supplement formal education and provide leadership, it would require to sensitize and mobilize community and ex periment through research and other developmental activities.

and read simple documents.

The third phase was considered the most important as the heretofore illiterate people were lamiliarised with their formal education project, was

## Literacy Brings Light to Dharavi Squatters

by Prakash Chandra

OR many residents of Dharavi in this city, "living in the dark" was both a figurative and literal description of their existence.

Dharavi is one of Asia's biggest slums. Residents not only had to live in badly lit dwellings amidst dark and narrow alleys but they also had to survive without the light of literacy or basic reading, writing and numeracy skills.

A 1991 census estimated that the slum community has more than 200,000 illiterates. In one area alone, some 75,000 people cannot sign their own names, a requisite, for instance, in government forms and applications for

Admittedly, the figure is only a fraction of the 280,109,000 adult illiterates in India as estimated by the Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

This puts the country's adult literacy rate in 1990 at only 48.3 per cent (the literacy rate, as defined by PROAP, refers to the percentage of the population aged 15 and above with basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy).

But the number of illiterates in Dharavi represents a rather large concentration of unlcarned people in a small area.

Thus, the community posed a major challenge to the Committee of Resource Organisation for Literacy (CORO) which is determined to bring basic learning to Dharavi.

Initially enlisting the support of various women's organ isations, such as the All-India Women's Conference, CORO volunteers started walking the ill-lit alleys of the slum to teach its residents. Literacy awareness marches launched the drive and created an essential atmosphere for the

 Targets were also narrowed down. While the initial plan called for the involvement of people from other communitics as well, it was eventually decided it was easier to focus just on the slum dwellers.

The literacy campaign's first phase involved teaching basic alphabets, words and numbers. The second phase provided students functional literacy to enable them to fill up basic forms, write letters

They were exposed to important social issues like brideburning, dowries, alcoholtsm and "untouchability" of certain members of the Indian caste society.

The literacy campaign is a success by any standards and has drawn the support of other groups like the Bombay Literacy Mission, the Society for Human and Environmental Development and Yuva Saathi. The Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work supported the project by making available students working on their Master of Social Work diploma.

Small religious groups have also joined the campaign, organtsing literacy camps in 30 small areas. One of the first student volunteers, Srinivas

The number of illiterates in Dharavi represents a rather large concentration of unlearned people in a small area

Sawant, was eager to do the work saying. The backward ness of the people, poverty and the huge population make Dharavi one of the most challenging areas."

The prospective beneficia ries were also pleased. One slum dweller said, "Our children are very eager to study."

The work was not always focused on basic literacy. "We have to deal with personal problems of the slum people. For instance, every family has at least one alcoholic. Here people spend more time earning money. And they come late in the evening. It is difficult to persuade them to attend literacy classes. Then, of course, there is the drinking water problem, scarcity of electricity and very little sanitation facilities," said Bhimrao. a social worker.

Despite the difficulties, the project pushed through and has since led to a circulating library project which required only a small capital. Some 600 houses were divided into four groups of 150 units each. A set of books is rotated in each group for a month.

The households demonstrated a keen interest in reading that they could hardly wait for the next set of books. "It is one of the best things that should happen to us. We are now looking forward to a new experience. It is as if a new window has been opened in our homes," said Niranjanbhai, a resident.

Another activity, the non-Depthnews Asia fundamental rights as citizens. started by the Bombay

Municipal Council for school dropouts. Teachers visit children at home to determine their needs. For example, children who have to work and cannot attend school are taught at home.

The Society for Human and Environment Development (SHED) runs three centers in Dharavi, the biggest of which has 600 children. Initiated by Begum Bilkis Lateef, wife of former Governor | H Lateef, SHED also conducts adult classes for the mothers of children enrolled in its centers. Mothers are compelled to attend the adult classes, a requirement so their children would not be suspended from the centers.

Yuva Saathi, another organisation involved in the literacy campaign, organises street plays featuring school children The plays underscore the importance of literacy. The organisation also conducts forums during which public officials dialogue with the people and explain government rules and regulations.

Shinde, who started Yuva Smathi, said, "We invite the municipal authority to answer the queries and complaints from the public." A sports club, Ekta, has also been initiated by Shinde. The club organises leadership development camps, civil defence classes

and story-telling competitions. Social work students, for their part, use the days allocated for field work to prepare the ground for the actual teaching of the slum dwellers by professional teachers. They visit their respective assignments, carefully study the residents and identify their problems so they can be addressed during the literacy classes with the help of government agen-

The significant number of people willing to assist the Dharavi campaign appear to be a major reason for its success.

Mr Sawant noted that some literacy drives have failed because their were few literate people who were willing to teach. The problem was compounded by the different languages spoken in the target areas, which made teaching difficult.

The success in Dharavi, so far, is encouraging mr Sawant to consider other activities. He is planning to conduct afterschool classes in mathematics and English for children who have trouble with these subjects. Children will also be encouraged to teach their parents. Literacy activities for school dropouts will also be

(8) It is necessary to ensure

and arrange at least three

terminal examinations includ-

ing the final examination in an

practise teaching is inade-

quate. Simulation classes has

to be introduced at all the in-

stitutions and due emphasis on

two-month crash training on

teaching should be given by

maintaining proper link be-

tween the schools and the

(9) The time devoted to

academic year for all courses.

## Politicians Derail Literacy Programme Ms Jayalatitha has said that lit-

inter-disciplinary and rela-

of individual's lifetime aspira-

tivistic, open ended in terms

tions, as well as in terms of

possible adaptations to chang-

ing times and environments.

Modern literacy is functional

in the sense that it is con-

cerned with the practical ap-

plication of reading and writ-

ing in daily life. Literacy ac-

cording to the UNESCO, is

learning to read and write and

count as an attempt towards

achieving political, economic

ARATE lessons in lite-An enthusiastic Ms Qudsia Gandhi, officer of Pusumpon Theyar dis-trict in Tamil Nadu state, has been teaching self-defence techniques to women as part of their empowerment under the district's literacy programme.

In the district of Pudukottai, newly literate women were taught to handle explosives as well as bank accounts so they could take over the operation of mines leased to private contractors.

In both districts, more than a thousand women involved in spreading literacy were alsogiven bicycles so they could reach other villages more eas-

But now Ms Gandhi and. Pudukottal district officer Ms Shéila Rani Chungat are under

At the last meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education, the Tamil Nadu education minister disclosed that complaints have been received about literacy volunteers engaging in political propaganda

in the Kannyakumari district.

acy. The salest survey [1989]

on literacy and primary educa-

tion through distance learning

revealed that only seven per

cent of the programme are

primary and these pro-

grammes are successful mostly

in the developed countries to

combat functional illiteracy.

Functional illiteracy is increas-

ingly becoming a problem for

the industrialized countries.

Governments of the industrial-

ized countries are becoming

aware that a large number of

Some workers are alleged to be connected with the terrorist Liberation Tigers of Sri Lanka. One of those pinpointed is the coordinator of the lead organisation in the literacy campaign in Tamil Nadu, the Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi.

The success of the Pondicherry is also being marred by accusations that the Science Forum, which organised the movement nationwide, is anti-patriotic. State ministers have objected to a song in the post-literacy primer which asks "freedom for the country" but questions: "Why powerty for us?"

Literacy and subservience do not go together, which is why some politicians seem to be going all-out in their efforts to derail India's literacy movement.

fire for their unconventional and allegedly disruptive management of the literacy programme in their districts.

Similar intrigues, charges of fund mismanagement and other forms of so sabotage, reportedly engineered by politicians, are being used to derail the literacy movement.

India, through its National Literacy Mission, has been notching successes in the literacy effort. In 1990, the nongovernmental organisation Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad received a US\$ 35,000 prize from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for leading the district of Ernakulam, Kerala state into total literacy.

Kerala itself is now fully literate, the first Indian state to become so. Pondicherry has 'also achieved full literacy, while Goa is 90 per cent liter-

But a backlash against the movement is forming. Already, NGO-led campaigns in some 10 to 15 states have been paralysed. Activists and literacy workers are being tagged subversives and accused of being linked to terrorists or outthat the literacy association Puduvai Arivoli Eyakkam be disbanded for distributing the offending literacy primer, and that teachers belonging to the Science Forum be removed from their posts. In response, authorities have withdrawn the primers from circulation and shifted the teachers to other assignments.

Politicians had demanded

Says Mr Parmeshwaran, general secretary of the Bharat Vigyan Samithi: "Politicians have realised the power of literacy and are feeling threat-

Full-length articles have expressed a similar opinion in the mass-circulation Indian Express.. One article says: "In States where literacy has taken roots, politicians find themselves marginalised and are therefore unhappy with the literacy programme. They see distinct advantages in keeping people dull, driven, mute and subservient. Literacy has even become a bone of contention in Centre-State relations."

Activists decry what they see as an effort to divert literacy funds to State treasuries. In Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister eracy programmes should be handled not by NGOs but by the State bureaucracy. The governments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are also demanding control of the

HE educational system

is among the largest

social enterprises in

any country. The present

gladesh has evolved with only

minor adjustments to the

patterns inherited from

Pakistan since independence

in 1971. Except for some ex-

pansion quantitatively, not

much change in the areas of

curriculum development, ex-

amination systems, vocational

education, physical facilities,

staff positions, supervision and

inspection, teacher education

and specially the quality of ed-

Frequent changes in politi-

cal powers after independence

could not bring about equality

of educational opportunities in

the country. As a result, the

programmes of teaching-

learning environment has de-

teriorated and no subsequent

change in the quality of educa-

tion could be attained.

Moreover, because of the re-

source constraints, it has not

been possible to pay adequate

attention to different sub-sec-

tors of education except pri-

mary education where the gov-

ernment paid increased atten-

tion to realise the goal of

achieving universal primary

The government has, how-

ever, recognised that in order

to enable secondary education

contribute much more to the

national development efforts,

it is necessary to tackle these

problems urgently, so as to in-

troduce some minimum stan-

dard and relevance at the sec-

ondary level of education. In

this ladder, Secondary Edu-

cation has a crucial role to

play, which prepares the stu-

dents for higher education, the

quality of which largely de-

termines the standard of

higher education. It prepares

also a good number of young

men and women who give up

education before or after the

completion of secondary edu-

cation due to one reason or the

education.

other.

ucation took place.

cducational system in Ban-

The National Literacy Mission had earlier identified district officers known for their dedication to the literacy mission, and given the funds to such officials. A district can get almost as much as 40 million rupees (US\$1.4 million.)

Today, secondary education

is a hotbed of controversy, be-

cause it fulfils no aims, the

standard of teaching is low and

there is laxity and confusion.

The entire teaching is not re-

lated to life in general but

caters to most urban require-

ments. It is said that the

teachers are the custodians of

society. The secondary level

teachers have a great respon-

sibility since they have to train

the youngsters between the

ages of 11 to 18 years so that

they become good and useful

Prominent among literacy activists are women who also lead in efforts to check liquor smuggling and bootlegging. and are active in the country's immunisation programme.

## Teacher Training Improves Educational Standard by Muhammad Anwar Hossain

things as may be considered vital. Besides, there are other problems in the existing educational set-up which continually agitate the minds of teachers, frustrate them and affect

their efficiency. As three-fourth of the secondary-level teachers have no pedagogical training and a small proportion who have such training find hard to practice and improve the teaching-learning conditions at this stage. The leacher-educa-

the knowledge of teachers by providing pre-service and inservice training programmes for primary and secondary level teachers. NAPE and PTIs provide training for primary level teachers and IER, TTCs, BIDE and SESDCs provide raining for secondary level teachers. TTC and VTIs provide training for the vocational trachers and CPEs provide training for physical education teachers in the country. All these educational insti-

quate facilities and opportunities in the field of professional development of the teachers. (g) lack of research facilities, (h) lack of proper books, journals etc. in the library, and (i) absence of a system of supervision which is needed for the development of teachers.

Apart from the recommendations on teacher education stated in the "Report of the Bangladesh National Education Commission" (The Summary and selected chapters, February 1988) the following few recommendations deserve due

(1) The present patterns of

B.Ed/Dip-in-Ed and M.Ed.

(TTC) /M.Ed (IER)/MA in

Education (TTC) should follow

the same curriculum and syl-

labus and obtain the same

Degree/Diploma only to avoid

confusions in the respective

(2) Education as a subject at

the graduation level has to be

introduced to the colleges

with recommendation of the

attention;

university.

perts.

TICs. (10) Necessary provision should be ensured so that participation of women teachers in the teacher education programmes is enhanced with the provision of their employment

in teaching in greater number. (11) New teachers' Training Institutions should be established (at least doubled or proportionate to be population); Selected PTIs to be upgraded to TTCs, Open University to run the distant education programmes smoothly and links to be maintained to all these educational institutions where the teachereducation programmes exist.

(12) Short-term pedagogical training can be ensured to all college and university level teachers including the Basic/Foundation Training at NAEM.

(3) At least two years' academic session in the college level and one full year aca demic session at B Ed levels should be introduced. (4) M Ed, M Phil and PhD

courses can be introduced with the establishment of a department of education to all the universities. (5) Research in education

should be popularized as per the need of society (6) The curricula and syllabi need to be modernised and

advanced courses including vocational training to be introduced in this discipline. (7) Appropriate text books

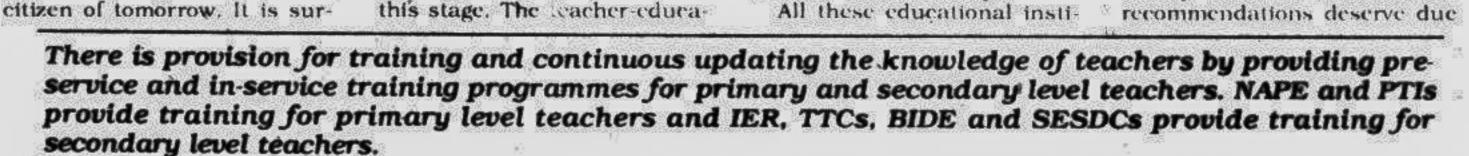
has to be produced and printed with recommendations of a Committee of Ex

(13) Short-course in-ser-

vice teachers training programmes can be established through NAPE and SESDCs and frequent academic supervisions to be made through TTCs, SESDCs, NAPE so that minimum standard/quality of education is emphasized in society; and (14) Adequate number of

teachers and staff for the smooth running of the teacher education programmes should be recruited and higher posts of subject teachers to be created for the qualitative improvement of the teacher edu-

cation programme. (The writer is Deputy Executive Director, Secondary Education and Science Development Centre)





Colleges like this impart training to teachers, but these are not enough. - Star photo

have so far been made to attract talents to the profession of teaching. Even, casual conversations often reveal that a man of calibre does not opt for teaching as a career or cannot continue in this profession for lack, of facilities, social insecurity, low status and such other

prising that no better efforts

tion programmes and research in this sector can save the situation only very partially and enable the teachers to understand the teaching-learning condition/situation in a better way and cater to the needs of society at large.

There is provision for training and continuous updating

ficient teachers and staff. (b)

lack of higher posts of subject teachers, (c) lack of physical facilities, (d) lack of hostel facilities, (c) lack of effective link between the modern trend of education, the currieula and the syllabi, (I) inade-

tutions face several problems

like (a) lack of trained and ef-