

Education

Feature

Politics of primary education

If not now, when?

by Myron Weiner

LATE one evening I met with a class of twenty five girls in a one room school house in a village thirty kilometres from Pune (India)...

would send my babies to my mother-in-law," said one girl. "We could have a creche," said another, "and we could have someone watch over all the children..."

Laws without Effect

These girls had a clearer vision of what was best for themselves and what was possible in their own lives than I had heard expressed by India's policy...

One by one each of the girls answered my questions. What was their name and age? What did they do during the day? What did their parents do? Had they ever been to school and for how long?...



Keeness to Learn

I asked the class whether they would have liked to remain in school. All but two girls raised their hands. The two explained that they had done so badly learning to read that they did not want to remain in school...

makers. While they all thought it possible to attend school if their parents would send them, the government of India has been unprepared to make education compulsory...

but do not require local authorities to introduce compulsory education.

In fact, to ensure that local authorities did not zealously introduce compulsion into an area that was not ready, these laws require that two-thirds of those present or at least one-half of the total number of members of the local authority have to approve...

No one need have been concerned with overzealous local bodies, for as it turned out, almost none of them made education compulsory. Before independence very little money was spent on primary education.

schools would raise enough money from the sale of crafts produced by children to pay for the cost of teachers. Basic Education was seen by some educators not simply as an educational programme but as a financial programme to make schools partially self-supporting.

Putting the Poor to Work

Child labour in India is not the underside of early industrialisation and capitalism, but is pre-industrial and pre-capitalist. While in 19th century England and the United States, children were employed by large factories, in India children are in the small scale sector and in agriculture.

Child labour is not a new phenomenon but a continuation of the traditional role of the child as a worker for or with the family and as a source of family income.

Moreover, most child workers in India are illiterate while in 19th century England and the United States child workers were able to read and write since they were generally in school for six years, the period of compulsory education. But in India most child workers have never attended school or have dropped out before completing four years of schooling...

India does have a Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act approved by the Indian parliament in 1987. It has provisions intended to protect working children from be-

ing employed in hazardous occupations. Critics of the legislation said that the government had legalised child labour. The law does precisely that. The new act imposes no age limit on the employment of children. It simply specifies that children are prohibited from being employed in certain hazardous occupations and processes.

Why have the state and central governments in India been unwilling to make education compulsory and to impose a ban on the employment of children? How are we to understand these policies in a country whose government elites for many years professed to be socialist and pro-poor...

India government officials, politicians of the major political parties, members of Rajiv Gandhi's educational reform commission (which did not recommend making education compulsory), Gandhian and other local level activists in non-governmental organisations have argued that child labour is the result of widespread poverty which forces families to send their children into the workforce rather than to school.

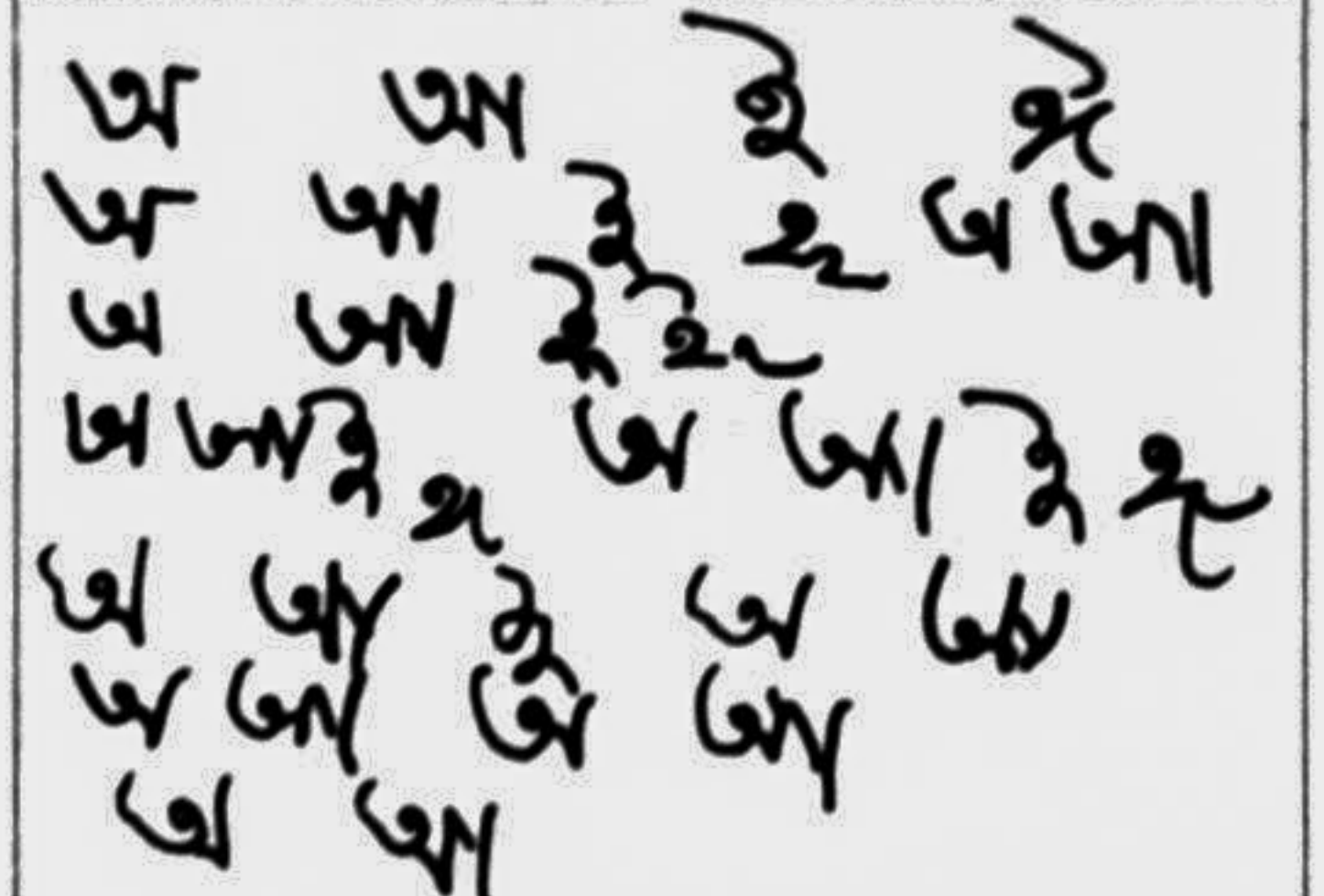
So long as education is not compulsory, India will continue to have a high incidence of child labour, a high illiteracy rate, a high fertility rate associated with low female literacy, and a poor quality labour force. The benefits of compulsory education are clear: the education of girls and the removal of children from the labour force would lead to a reduction in fertility.

Adult Education It's Never too Late

by Raffat Binte Rashid

AMENA Khatun, a part-time housemaid, is a wife of a rickshawpuller and a mother of three sons. She lives in a small shabby hut in front of a school from where everyday she hears the children read out the alphabets, she never had the chance to learn. This makes her all the more encouraged and determined to take her children to school.

Amena's life is dull and uneventful a usual story of her lot with no laughter, no hopes and no promises. Each dawn, she wakes up reluctantly, knowing that no matter how hard she works, she will always remain poor, she will never have enough to eat or wear.



But Amena strongly feels the urge to try and change her luck, and thus in her early thirties she is now able to break away from the chain of fear and shame and educate herself. She is a student of Pre Primary school in Wahab colony in Bashaboo, Dhaka. This is a school for the slum children in that area and for adults who understand the need for education.

School Doors Closed to Many Indian Kids

by Prakash Chandra

FOR want of a birth certificate, some 270,000 children reaching school age in India are being denied admission to school. Some analysts even estimate the numbers to run into the millions, mostly children in slums and surrounding areas whose parents have not bothered to register the births, or who were unaware that they should do so.

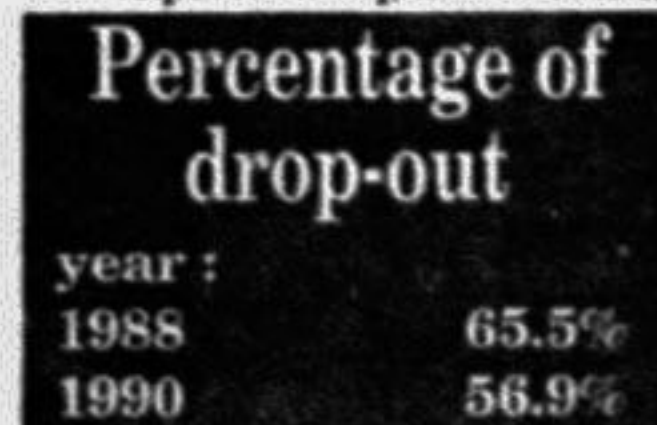
Another problem concerns the children of prostitutes who live in red light districts. An address in the district is itself a stigma, and for a single mother doubly so. In fact it is almost impossible for the children to get admitted anywhere, even if they were able to present birth certificates.

ment of fees procedures which are very complex — processes which people from the slums cannot be expected to be able to follow. But a birth affidavit is acceptable in lieu of a birth certificate, says Mr Hamid Arfi, Director of Education of the Delhi Municipal Corporation.

Compulsion for Compulsory Education

by Monira Hossain

FREE and compulsory primary education has been guaranteed in the article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. It made its first effective step with the take-over of 36,105 existing managed, aided and non-aided schools, under the provision of Acquisition of Primary School in 1974.



According to recent statistics, 6-10 year age group children stand at 1 crore 78 lakhs 88 thousand and only 16 per cent of them are or were attending primary school upto recently. Average number of the students registered per school is 200 and the numbers of school structure stand at only

No proof of birth, no education. This go-by-the-book attitude of Indian school authorities is depriving thousands — some say millions — of children of the schooling they need.

The registration of births and deaths is mandatory all over the country in line with census requirement. But many parents, often themselves illiterate, do not know about this. A typical reaction is that of Ahmed Ali. Does it mean that my daughter Rashida was not born in Delhi because we did not register her birth with the Municipal Corporation? It is a clear case of discrimination against the poor, he says angrily.

ificates and ration cards. As most children are born in hospitals, these certificates are not difficult to obtain, says Ms Ramaben Shelat, an administrator of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation. She also points out, however, that the old custom of not naming a baby soon after birth creates problems and the child often ends up not being registered. Registration procedures can also differ. For example, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has its own procedure and has fines and pay-

Sangh has 138 students, all from the slums. Beena Das, a teacher, says that the same problem of lack of birth certificate is encountered during admission. But we often guide the parents on how to procure one even if it is quite late. School headmistress Chandravati Das even helps the parents fill up the necessary forms. Some children who fail to get admitted into neighbourhood primary schools find a place in alternative or experimental schools run by private groups. One such school is Khazana in the Gobindpuri slums of South Delhi which, says school coordinator Ms Saraswati, has about 500 children. "Some receive formal education, others informal." Among the latter is 15-year-old Reeta whose efforts to enter the formal school system have been persistently turned down. At Khazana she has trained in various skills like sewing, embroidery, tailoring and repairing clothes.

Table with 4 columns: Government, Total, Private, Total. Rows for 1988, 1990, 1992. Includes a section for 'Drop-out rates of 1988, 1990, 1992 in %' and 'Repetition rates in %'.

50 per cent of the total demand before it was made compulsory. Teacher-student ratio was 1:50. Among the physical facilities provided, the one to get highest plus point will get a free book printed, with financial assistance from UNICEF.

area of the country from any time it desires. The guardians of the children shall have to admit their children in the nearest primary schools. The present Govt made primary education compulsory in 68 thanas of 64 districts in 1992. 11,591 schools were brought under the umbrella with 6,890 govt, 2,042 non-Govt and 2,659 ltbdal Madrasas the target group were 6,02,971 children of age 6+ and 28,98,100 children of age between 6+ and 10. Official report says that rate of admission has gone upto 65.071.

The government has made primary education compulsory in all the thanas of the country from the current academic session. To achieve the objectives of 'Education for All by the Year 2000', steps initiated by the Directorate of Primary Education include: steps for raising enrollment of school age group children, reduction of drop out rate, provision for expansion of physical facilities of schools, the distribution of books free of cost, the



Innerwheel Club of Dhaka Cosmopolitan runs a literacy project for the under privileged children at Siddiawari.

Teach your Kids to be Kind and Good



How strange it is that there isn't a science of peace. There's a science of war. Nothing comparable to the science of armaments and strategy. There are colleges of war but why can't we study and have a science of peace? Peace starts with children. We teach them to hate. We teach them intolerance and racism and all of that. Children, if you leave them alone, they'll play with each other, regardless what colour, creed or anything. Audrey Hepburn 1929-1993 Courtesy: Future