

## Feature

## Utsha — A Place Of New Hope

by Sonya M Sultan

WINDING one's way down the narrow lanes near Rayer Bazaar, one reaches a little compound with about four tin-sheltered rooms. A small green notice outside indicates that this is Utsha, a primary school. So far there seems to be nothing remarkable about this school. But in fact, it is quite unique — because of the reasons for which it was set up, its mode of operation, teaching techniques and because of the people involved in it — its founder, teachers and of course the students and their parents.

Utsha is a school set up to help children in slum areas, especially those who are supported by single, working mothers. Many such single mothers can only find employment in factories e.g. garments factories or as domestic servants, some are self-employed and a few resort to prostitution. Whichever way these women attempt to earn a living and thus support their family, they often have very little time left to look after and educate their children. As a result, the child is often neglected, though the mother can hardly be blamed in such cases.

Having a chance to put their children in a boarding school helps to ease the work burden of these women and it also guarantees that the children will get the care and attention they could not get at home. The school being run on a sponsorship basis, it is also an education these children can afford.

Nipu, a little girl of about four, comes from such a single-parent family. Her mother works in a garment factory and before Nipu joined Utsha, she was locked up at home on her own for more than twelve hours a day while her mother went to work. Now Nipu is quite happy at Utsha — she has plenty of friends to play with and there is always an adult present, ready to help her with any problems she may have.

Not all the children studying at Utsha have working mothers, though most of the children in residence do. But day pupils all come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, at Utsha, they pay Tk 25 a month in tuition fees and receive a relatively high standard of education. The teachers are all well-educated, dedicated, and most

of all, conscientious in the performance of their work. They are all very aware of the aim Utsha has — providing a suitable environment for underprivileged children in which their full potential can be developed and giving these children some of the opportunities middle and upper class children have.

Keeping this in mind, the school tries to follow a western

health and nutrition, environmental science, gender relations and community cooperation are also included. This demonstrates a wish to provide a broad framework of education within which children's various abilities are encouraged and within which they may gain both the academic and practical knowledge needed to succeed in the real world.



system of education, though still covering the Bengali curriculum set by the government. A 'western' system of education means unlike in other government or private schools, all work is actually finished in school. Teachers realise that children have no time to do homework and can receive no help from illiterate parents. There is also an unusually large share of extra curricular activities which include drawing, painting, singing, sports, and subjects outside the standard curriculum such as ethics,

though some of the parents wish that some day the school will run solely on the fees they themselves will provide, that is not yet possible. So far, all the students have to pay Tk 25 a month tuition fees and parents of children in boarding have to pay an extra 100 taka or more, depending on their income. A sponsorship system has been set up to cover the cost of food, clothing, bedding and medical services for the children staying at the school. Each sponsor is therefore asked to contribute Tk 6000

for one year, to help in the upkeep of one child. So far there are fourteen children living at the school; more would like to come into residence, but sponsors will have to be obtained for them first.

Mahbooba Aktar Mahmood, the founder of the school, has also initiated certain income generating activities to cover the administration costs of Utsha and the rent for the school building. She runs a catering service and now supplies the Lalitana Girls' College canteen, blooming buds, an English medium school, and the canteen of a garments factory. She also gets embroidery work done on saris and other clothes on a commercial basis. Once these business ventures are fully established, it is hoped that 25 per cent of the profits can be used to meet the running costs of Utsha.

What is most impressive is that so far enough people have been inspired or moved by the idea of helping a few poor children gain an education to offer their services without demanding any pay. All the teachers at Utsha only have their transport costs paid, and most of the women involved in the catering service are not being paid yet. They hope to be paid regularly in the future, but for the time being they will willingly spend their time and energy in order to keep Utsha going.

The woman who set up the school — Mahbooba Mahmood has been spending her own money in order to keep the school functioning, and far from getting any pay, she has had to lower her own standard of living in order to raise that of her pupils at Utsha.

However once one has seen and spoken to the children at Utsha, one cannot but fall under their spell and the dedication of the staff becomes comprehensible. It is difficult to describe with words how intelligent, kind, cheerful and adorable the children are. One may even feel tempted to call them mischievous little *fereshatahs*. Utsha is a place where they are safe! They can play, learn new things, and they can dream — dream of becoming pilots, doctors, rickshaw pullers, and try and make these dreams come true. May be for these little *fereshatahs* Utsha is somewhat like the Jikatola branch of heaven.

## Education

## Making Bhutan's Schools More Relevant

by Patricia Roberts

THERE are too many students and not enough teachers," laments the headmistress of Changgangkha Primary School as she surveys the crowded room. Some 48 children, average age six years old, are busily and happily drawing pictures on child-sized tables in a classroom in Thimphu, capital city of the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan.

But it would be difficult not to hear the undertone of pride in the headmistress' voice. Not so many years ago, primary schools were not very popular in Bhutan. Though the government provided free education, most people didn't see why they should send their children. After all, the classes were taught entirely in English, a language very few young children understood. Nor did the textbooks, published in India, seem relevant to life in Bhutan.

How to make public education relevant was, indeed, a challenge to educators since the introduction of Bhutan's first primary school system in the early 1960s. Most residents of this sparsely populated country are illiterate subsistence farmers who speak Dzongkha. The indigenous literature and history is written in the Chhokri script, a Tibetan-based script derived from Sanskrit and unfamiliar even to scholars.

But the Changgangkha Primary School is part of Bhutan's new education programme. It aims to provide a different kind of school, customized to fit Bhutan's unique needs. What began as a New Approach to Primary Education (NAPE), a mid-1980s experimental pilot project, has been adopted nationwide in Bhutan's school system. It is an application of advanced educational techniques in one of South Asia's least developed countries, where the adult illiteracy rate averages 80 per cent and adult female illiteracy is as high as 95 per cent.

Bhutan, a country the size of Switzerland, is wedged between two very different cultures: that of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north and of India to the south. From the eighth century, Buddhist monasteries reigned, but the feudal lords of Europe, over the craggy landscape of Bhutan. Young monks (male only) learned an-

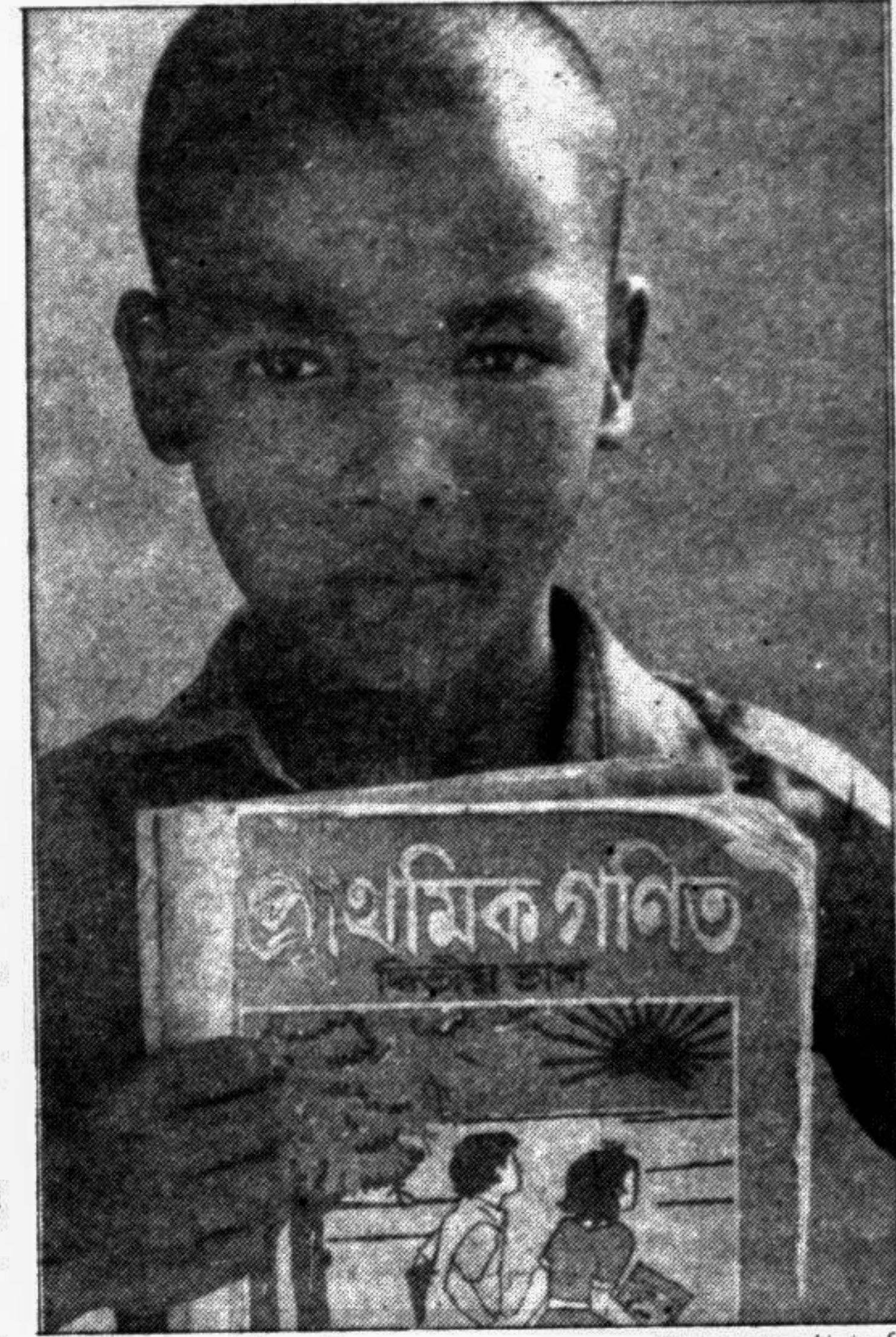
cient Buddhist culture and rituals, written in Chhokri. Monasteries also taught a wide range of subjects designed to perpetuate Buddhism, among them: Tibetan Buddhist healing, agriculture, art, astronomy, numerology and practical accounting.

Bhutan's first primary education system came from India, but it was outdated and inflexible. Its stilted curriculum was taught in English from

1984, the Department of Education formulated a new national education plan. Two years later, a NAPE pilot programme was introduced into 12 schools.

Most pre-primary students enter NAPE schools speaking no English. In the early grades, most instruction is oral, using both Dzongkha and English. The first 100 English words are taught through pictures.

That children study in



Learning arithmetic.

Courtesy — Unicef

textbooks designed for use in India and patterned on the archaic British system of the early 1900s.

By the mid-1980s, educators began to search for a Bhutanese-based curriculum. Textbooks were written with help from the British Overseas Development Agency, the World University Service of Canada and the British Voluntary Service Overseas, with support from UNICEF. In

English — with Dzongkha as a required subject of study — might seem an anomaly in a country with a policy of preserving the national identity. The country restricts tourism, architecture and satellite television. But teaching English, says Peter Chen, former UNICEF Project Officer for Education, is "not a contradiction. It's wise move for Bhutan to step into the 20th century." English is a reality of life in

Bhutan, from shop signs to government documents, rental videos and textbooks for higher education. Most students still go outside Bhutan for university-level education, usually to Indian universities, which teach in English. Besides, the national Dzongkha Development Commission is still developing written Dzongkha, and very few Dzongkha language books exist.

In every way possible, the curriculum incorporates reflects the Bhutanese perspective. Students learn to count Bhutanese money and measure with Bhutanese instruments. They study local tools, animals, food and geography.

Assuming that primary schooling is all most Bhutanese children will get, the NAPE approach teaches basic skills and problem-solving capabilities. The goal is to enrich the lives of all, no matter what level of education they complete.

A 1988 evaluation of NAPE methods was so positive that NAPE was rapidly implemented system-wide. By 1990, NAPE schools were nationwide, and today the method is used in the lower grades of all of Bhutan's 235 primary schools and some junior high schools.

One measure of NAPE's success is continually increasing primary school enrollment. Now, 56,773 students attend school — 56 per cent of Bhutan's school-aged children. The proportion of girls, now 43 per cent of enrollment, is rising.

But even in the remotest areas, communities have begun to band together to build their own schools, a development largely attributed to enthusiasm for the NAPE system. In areas with 30 or more students within one hour's walking distance, the Department of Education provides educational materials and trained teachers for community-constructed schools. UNICEF provides continuing assistance, as well as a programme to train teachers how to teach in multi-grade classrooms. Today, more than 8,000 students are studying in 92 such community schools in Bhutan. All things considered, Bhutan is well on the way to the goal of universal education by the year 2000.

Patricia Roberts is a freelance writer based in Kathmandu.

## Compulsory Primary Education Programme : Problems &amp; Issues

by Syed Naquib Muslim

The World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP and other donor agencies are emphasizing education of mothers for the education of their children. Studies carried by these agencies in the developing countries testify that there is a linkage between the guardians' educational level and regular attendance of their children in the schools. The present study validates the fact that among the graduate guardians the rate of non-attendance of children is only 0.83% and among the guardians having post-graduate degrees, the percentage of non-attendance is zero. It also proves that the children of the literate or educated mothers are more regular in attending schools than those of illiterate fathers.

The rate of literacy in Bangladesh ranges from 26 to 30 per cent whereas the rate of literacy of the SAARC countries like Sri Lanka and Maldives ranges between 88 to 90 per cent.

Perceiving the importance of literacy, the present government has introduced massive compulsory primary education programme (CPEP) as one of the strategies to alleviate increasing poverty and to raise the level of development consciousness of the multitude of population.

The Jatiya Sangsad enacted a law namely the Primary Education (Compulsory) Act no 27, 1990. A total of about 29 lac primary age group population (6 to 10 years of age) are being covered for primary education through 9,295 primary schools and 2,644 *ebtedayee madrasahs* under this programme.

It is of course an uphill task for the government to implement the goals of an ambitious programme like CPEP when it is facing unbridled population growth and continuous resource deficits. The CPEP has been operating in 68 thanas of 64 districts since January, 1992 and time is not ripe to make a summative evaluation of the on-going programme as only two years have elapsed in the mean time.

Recently, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC) conducted a survey on a multistage random sampling basis to identify the constraints on the implementation of the CPEP in various parts of the country where it is operating. The underlying objective of the study was to help the government in evolving pragmatic strategies so that the CPEP goals are fully implemented. The study covered 241 villages of 44 thanas under 43 districts of Bangladesh and 37,612 households have been surveyed. The newly recruited

process? What measures may be adopted to counteract them?

The study has revealed certain interesting features which are discussed below.

## Findings

The majority of the members belonging to the households surveyed have been found illiterate the percentage being 39.45%. Average literacy rate in the surveyed areas in the terms of writing skills is 42.56% which is much higher than the national average which is claimed as 26%. About 53% of the household members have been found landless and 22% belong to the marginal farmers group. About 52% of the heads of the households have monthly income less than Tk 1500. The result is that they cannot afford to send their children to schools as the latter are a ready source of cost-free labour for the families.

Of the primary age population, 79.50% have been enrolled in the primary level institutions and the rest have not been enrolled. The interviewee-guardians have claimed that 92% of the enrolled chil-

dren regularly attend classes. The highest rate of student attendance is in Chittagong division and the lowest is in Rajshahi. Irregularity of attendance occurs during seed-sowing and harvesting seasons.

The above facts indicate that non-enrolment and non-attendance of the children in the schools are two major problems CPEP is facing. Seven hundred and seventeen guardians have admitted that poverty is the main reason for which they cannot afford to get their children educated despite their having intention. There are many children who are indispensable to their parents for supplementing labour and therefore they are non-spare for going to schools. As many as 196 interviewees have opined that undeveloped communication is another demotivating factor for which guardians are reluctant to get enrolled or even if they are enrolled they do not feel like attending schools. Four hundred and twenty respondents think that they do not see any future if their children get educated and therefore they do not feel motivated to send them to schools.

The study further reveals that drop-out is a major problem in the primary education sub-sector. In the study 2,184 drop-out cases have been identified; in the surveyed areas drop-out rate is higher in case of boys (51%) than of girls (49%). Khulna has the highest drop-out rate while Barisal has the lowest.

The World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP and other donor agencies are emphasizing education of mothers for the education of their children. Studies carried by these agencies in the developing countries testify that there is a linkage between the guardians' educational level and regular attendance of their children in the schools. The present study validates the fact that among the graduate guardians the rate of non-attendance of children is only 0.83% and among the guardians having post-graduate degrees, the percentage of non-attendance is zero. It also proves that the children of the literate or educated mothers are more regular in attending schools than those of illiterate fathers. This finding confirms the validity of the proposition that mothers should receive priority in education. Here again the question of adult lit-

eracy arises.

Effectiveness of teaching and retention of lessons by the children depends considerably on the teaching methods/style practised by the teachers. The study reveals that the teaching strategy practised by the non-government school teachers are more effective than that of the government school teachers. Majority of the respondents are appreciative of the innovative teaching techniques that are in practice in the non-government primary schools especially those run by BRAC. Here teachers are more attentive, creative, punctual, affectionate, friendly and informal. Students feel motivated to spend their time in the classrooms. The state of the extra-curricular activities in both the government and non-govern-

ment schools is less than satisfactory whereas it is more satisfactory in the schools following kindergarten approach. One of the remarkable features of the teachers of *ebtedayee madrasahs* is that they themselves maintain punctuality and enforce it on their students.

The Act on primary education clearly spells out the role to be played by different committees towards implementation of the programme. The study shows that these committees are not active or mobile; only 0.71% of the guardians have been motivated by the ward committee. Meetings for problem identification and solution are not held regularly; it is stated that one or two meetings were held throughout 1992 although at least 12 meetings are expected to be held each year.

Effectiveness of teaching and retention of lessons by the children depends considerably on the teaching methods/style practised by the teachers. The study reveals that the teaching strategy practised by the non-government school teachers are more effective than that of the government school teachers. Majority of the respondents are appreciative of the innovative teaching techniques that are in practice in the non-government primary schools especially those run by BRAC.

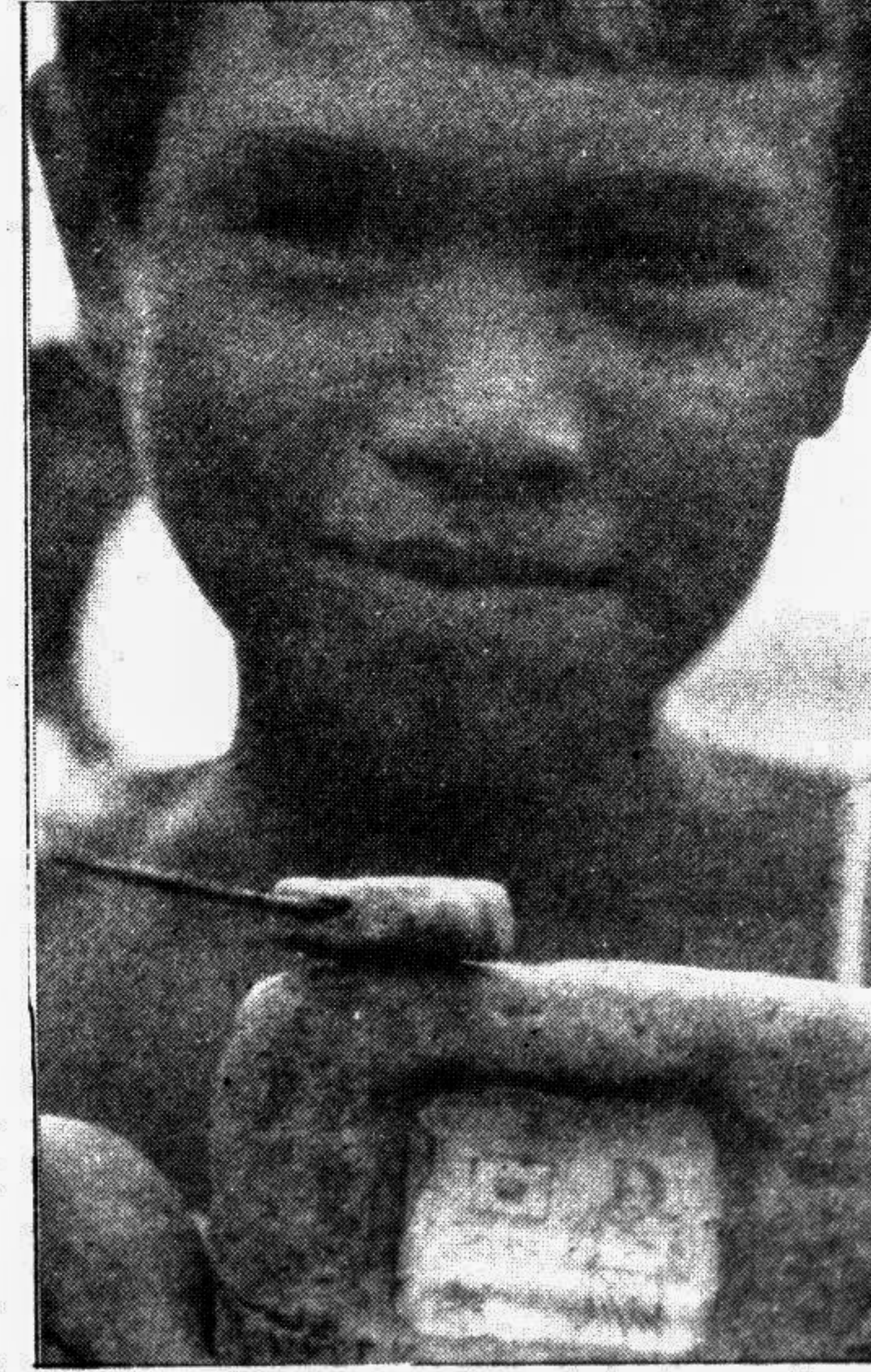
## Suggested Measures

The above scenario demands adoption of concrete and pragmatic steps if CPEP goals are to be achieved.

1. Poverty alleviation programmes undertaken by the government or non-government organizations need to be integrated. If the related programmes operate in isolation, none can yield positive results. Landless people whose children drop-out deserve special attention. It has to be appreciated that unless poverty of the rural and urban population is reduced, enrolment rate will not rise and drop-out rate will not decline.

2. The office of the Thana Education Officer (TEO) should be properly equipped or strengthened. TEO should be more mobile for more effective supervision to ensure regularity and punctuality of teachers and attendance of students. Surprise visits rather than informed ones should be practised; informed inspection will be a wasteful exercise. The culture of lavish hospitality to the inspecting officers by the target institutions should be discontinued.

3. Ward Committees should be reorganised to make them functionally more strong and contributory. Coordination among the members of the committee, teachers and guardians has to be further intensified. It is necessary to provide development orientation to the committee members so that they can perceive the importance of primary



The child made a clay TV to play with, but have media messages of education reached him? Courtesy — Unicef

education and the significance of their role.

4. Heads of the primary education institutions need to be trained in the areas of organizational management and leadership. BRAC schools are demonstrating better performance because each teacher in a school is a leader; a teacher with leadership qualities/skills can inspire the learners, behave with them in a friendly way and teach in an unobtrusive way. Teachers are the real assets for a school. Therefore, proper recruitment has to be ensured so that committed persons are inducted for teaching responsibility.

5. Most of the primary education institutions practise traditional mode of teaching.

As a result, the learning experience of the students is rather painful. Recreational facilities or opportunities for extra-curricular activities may work as a source of motivation for the little learners. Text books which contain hard learning materials/exercises create a sense of fear in the simple and innocent boys and girls.

6. Simply penal measures to compel parents or teachers to bring children to schools will not yield positive results. Side by side with the 'push factors', 'pull factors' may be allowed to operate. Teachers and students may hold rallies to attract children to schools.

Committed teachers should be ceremonially rewarded; they may be encouraged to utilise the survey-report prepared by the school managing committee.

With the emergence of the present democratic government, CPEP has received its due attention and emphasis.

The government seems bent upon implementing the programme although several impeding factors are hindering the process. The impact of the programme during the last two years is not clearly visible. The findings of the study provide grounds of both hope and despair although these many not represent the actual picture of the situation. It is however expected that from the problems as discussed above actors of CPEP will receive some cues on the basis of which they may devise further mechanisms for the successful accomplishment of the programme goals.

[The writer is a Deputy Director, BPATC, Savar and a member of the BCS (Admin).]

## BANGLADESH

Estimated population in 1993: 122,210,000; Annual population growth rate, 1980-93: 2.5%; GNP per capita in 1990: \$200; Duration of primary education: 5 years.

Bangladesh confronts nearly all of the educational problems plaguing developing nations. Primary education was made compulsory in 1993, but more than 20 per cent of school-age children have never attended school; of those enrolling, 60 per cent drop out, mostly girls.

Education policy aims at increasing capacity, overcoming gender disparity and improving quality and relevance. An ambitious government programme aims to construct 100,000 classrooms by the year 2000 and to encourage 9,000 registered non-government schools to open.

Non-formal education is also being encouraged, such as the pioneering BRAC-Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, which operates 12,000 schools for 8-16 year olds who have never attended a government school, or the Under-privileged Children Education Programme (UCEP) for street children and child labourers. Girls are being offered 8 years free education compared with 5 for boys to encourage them with their studies and 60 per cent of newly recruited teachers must be women.

Primary textbooks, the curriculum and materials are being developed with an emphasis on making education more relevant to rural life.

The adult literacy rate in 1991 was 44 per cent for men and 23 per cent for women. Since a large-scale campaign was set up in 1980 and abandoned in 1982, efforts have been sporadic and on a modest scale with most work carried out by NGOs and directed mainly at women. A network of adult literacy committees to operate programmes and rural libraries is at present under discussion. The country aims to increase its literacy rate to 62 per cent by the end of the decade.

Courtesy: UNESCO