

Social Education

**Ten Years In
Retrospect**

By
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Indian Adult Education Association
30 Faiz Bazar
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Published by :
Indian Adult Education Association,
30 Faiz Bazar,
DELHI.

Series No. 34
December
1957

Price : 50 n.P.

Printed at :
Navchetan Press Private Ltd.,
(Lessees of Arjun Press)
Naya Bazar, DELHI.

Origin of Social Education

In the history of the adult education movement, which extends over at least fifty years, the last ten have been perhaps the most significant, for changes of far reaching consequences have taken place in it during this period. Not only has the movement spread out, covering a much wider population than it has ever done in fifty years, but what is more, its concept today is much wider than it has ever been.

To begin with, it was almost exactly ten years ago that the basis was laid for the social education of today at the Fifth National Conference of the Indian Adult Education Association, which met in Rewa on December 29-31, 1947. The Conference at once reflected the new milieu that Independence had brought into existence and its repercussions on the adult education movement.

The resolution, which clearly marks the demarcation between adult and social education said:

“Now that power has passed into the hands of the people on whom must devolve within the next few months the responsibility for making grave decisions, this Conference stresses the view that the need for adult education in all

aspects of its programme was never greater in our land than it is today.

“At present the people are confronted with new problems and difficulties and new social and moral urgencies. It is necessary, therefore to reinterpret the function and develop further, through bold experimentation, the technique of adult education as the only means of equipping the Indian people to play their part worthily in democratic social order.”

Having thus invested social education with a perspective, the Conference defined the concept of social education. It declared:

“Adult education is larger than literacy and literacy should not be regarded as the best or the inevitable starting point of adult education in the prevailing circumstances of the country.

“Adult education must aim at enabling the common man to live a richer life in all its aspects—social, economic, cultural and moral. For this purpose, adult education must definitely envisage all adult centres as social centres, interested primarily in providing social, recreational and cultural facilities for the people and must endeavour to develop their powers of initiative, judgement and integrity as citizens.

“While a great deal of emphasis will naturally be placed on the education of the illiterate, adult education should not confine its attention to

this class but should be extended to cover various forms of "further" or "continuation" education in particular through lectures, seminars, discussion groups, art, craft and music clubs. Peoples' Colleges and other agencies need to be developed in India in the light of her special need.

"In order to expedite the process of adult education and reinforce the appeal of the printed and the spoken word, it is essential to make the fullest use as far as it is practicable of the modern media of mass communication like the Radio, the Cinema, the Press, the Theatre, Folk lore, Arts etc."

Social Education Spreads out

This decade has been, thus, primarily the realisation of the implications of this definition. It has had its impact on the different aspects of the movement. New methods to suit new objectives defined for social education have come into existence; some have proved themselves appropriate to our conditions and others not.

The requirements of the organisation have also had to be reassessed for, the introduction of planning has provided social education with a new dimension which needs further exploration. The First Five Year Plan and the Second and the Community Development Scheme have all given a great fillip to the movement. Social Education as an integral part of Community Development Scheme

covers administratively the whole country.

Thus by about the middle of the decade under review, social education had not only secured recognition of the vital role it had in the nation's development but also spread out extensively, more rapidly than had been anticipated. However, these developments in the field have thrown up problems of their own and whether the programme in operation will prove its worth or not will depend on the wisdom with which the problems are handled.

Organisational Developments

Perhaps the most notable development in the growth of the movement was the recognition by the Government of the need to regard social education as a part of the education services it normally provides. This need was made vocal for the first time in July, 1949 when the Indian Adult Education Association submitted a Memorandum emphasising the need of whole time workers in social education and pointed out that the lackadaisical efforts of amateurs was prone to be more harmful than good to the movement. Programmes of social education, the Memorandum said "(could not be) developed by immature students just emerging from schools and colleges...much less by teachers in elementary and secondary schools who are induced to divert an extra hour or their free time for a small monetary consideration". The Memorandum, therefore, stressed on the need for training and building up of competent teachers, organisers and other grades

of workers, necessary to promote the movement on healthy and robust lines.

The Memorandum also pointed out that all this needed a well thought out administrative set up in the Government. It said: "enormous amount of additional work involved in the promotion of social education cannot be taken up by the Departments of Public Instruction as an appendix, as it were, to the work on hand by the Department of Education, nor should it be entrusted to bodies involved or affiliated with political works." Consequently, the Memorandum suggested the setting up of an independent organisation with a fresh outlook of its own. This organisation, the Memorandum suggested, should be an Indian Union Board for Adult Education for the promotion of the social education movement which would deal with the problems of implementing programmes. It also suggested the setting up of State Boards of Social Education and the setting up of departments of Social Education which would be independent of both Universities and of other educational departments of the Government. The board were to effect necessary coordination between these various bodies. The Board was to consist of fifteen members nominated by the Union Ministry of Education in consultation with various State Governments and from voluntary agencies engaged in adult education.

In October, the same year, a deputation from the Association met the Union Minister of Education, Maulana Azad, and impressed upon him the need to implement the recommendations of the

Memorandum. This again may well be regarded as a land-mark in the history of the social education movement in India, for, thereafter, social education began to attract the serious attention of the Government.

To be sure, the steps that were recommended in the Memorandum were not implemented immediately. Nonetheless, the Memorandum became the basis of the administrative structure for social education. In the Union Ministry itself, though social education does not yet have a section of its own, a section for basic and social education was created in 1953. In the States, social education became an integral part of the Departments of Education and today, in many States, Additional Directors of Education exclusively in charge of Social Education, have been appointed and many other states have accepted the need to do so. At the District level, in many States, District Social Education Officers have been appointed.

At the Union level, the Union Board is still to be established but an important step in the direction of evolution was taken when a committee for social education was set up in the Central Advisory Board of Education.

The first crucial problem before the movement is that of a suitable organisational machinery for it. One of the primary considerations for the operational efficiency in social education is the necessity to provide scope for the full play of local initiative. This precondition is only rarely, if ever, obtained in

a bureaucratic structure. True, adult education workers had urged upon the Government to assume more and more responsibility for the conduct of the movement but this responsibility, they had thought, would be to provide voluntary agencies with the material support necessary for them to carry on the work. This was the tradition in the field of education in its other aspects where the schools run by the Government were comparatively few and where the lion's share of the burden of providing educational facilities to people rested on non-official agencies.

This issue was raised for the first time by the adult education workers at the Seventh Conference of the Indian Adult Education Association which was held in Hyderabad in 1950. The Resolution on this subject adopted by the Conference said:

“.....Voluntary agencies are more free to use their resources with a minimum of restrictions and to select personnel with greater freedom. Such agencies, however cannot flourish without the liberal and generous support of the State. Through giving aid to such agencies governments can make available funds go much further than otherwise. This Conference urges the State Governments to adopt a definite policy to progressively help and promote voluntary agencies and give them a recognised place in their scheme of adult education.”

Since the resolution was adopted the weight of public opinion has wrought a change in the Govern-

ment's attitude towards voluntary agencies and it has certainly been for the better. However a firm policy which would prove beneficial to voluntary agencies without impairing their efficiency is yet in the process of evolution. The experience of the Central Social Welfare Board in this respect provides a fund of experience and if there is a will to learn from it—which it would appear is sadly lacking—it should certainly help to formulate policies so that State assistance does not become a curse but a blessing.

In this context, one of the preconditions for a cooperative relationship between the officials and non-officials is the creation of an identity of concern between the two. As it happens now, what appears vital to the official seems trivial to the non-official and vice versa. The result is that frequently cynicism—or at best benign patronage—constitutes the undertone of the official's attitude to the voluntary workers. On the part of the non-officials, a sense of moral righteousness determines their relationship with officials. Until officials and non-officials grasp the ethos and the sense of purpose behind the advocacy of voluntary agencies the relationship between the two cannot be expected to be mutually enriching. Otherwise it will continue to be a sorry tale of inane platitudes utterly bereft of any sense of purpose.

Variety of Programmes in Social Education

Another significant feature, that contrasts prominently with the period before this decade, is the

arge variety of programmes that have come into vogue in social education. A review of developments in this field reflect not only a trend towards refining traditional programmes but also the addition of new ones to suit new purposes that flow out of changing circumstances in the country. The shifts from *adult* education to *social* education brought on the scene new programmes necessary to mobilise the community to action and influence attitudes more directly and positively.

Literacy

Adult education began with literacy with which it was regarded synonymous till almost the beginning of the era under review. The first Seminar of the Indian Adult Education Association held at Jabalpur in 1950 to consider techniques for the liquidation of illiteracy explicitly stated not only the necessity of literacy programmes but also their limitation. The recommendation said:

“...The scope of adult education includes and extends far beyond the activity concerned more particularly with the task of making people literate. And yet the important role of literacy must not be overlooked in any scheme of adult education. Literacy must be there as an essential aspect of adult education as it affords opportunity to the individual to educate himself through the most potent means of written or the printed word. It is, therefore, necessary that the progress of education should not be slowed down by the limitations which fetter the

progress of mass literacy. There are efficient and effective means of providing education, other than literacy and it is essential that fullest advantage should be taken of those means. Reconstruction of democratic life should not wait till the vast masses have become literate."

What has been the achievement of literacy movement after independence? I can do no better than quote Sardar Sohan Singh, the Assistant Educational Adviser, Ministry of Education :

"After the virtual petering out of the adult literacy movement after 1942, it more than regained its momentum between 1948 and 1950. But so far as the reports go, it has not advanced beyond the level of about 40,000 classes in a year. Forty thousand classes for a country with an illiterate adult population of 18 crores is not an inspiring number, especially when we remember that the average efficiency of a literacy class in India seldom rises above 50%. It is too early as yet to assess the impact of community development programmes on the literacy movement. The indications are that it has given an upward push to it. But...we have not firm statistics available to translate indications into certainty.*"

An important development in literacy programmes is the attempt to relate it to social education purpose. "Literacy" the First National Seminar had

*Adult Education in Community Development—A Symposium; pp. 1.2; Indian Adult Education Association, 1956.

pointed out "should not be divorced from social education work." It had also emphasised that "teaching of 3 Rs should be so designed as to include topics relating to general knowledge..." This meant that literacy had to be conceived in the context of social education and related to its objectives. To enable this, an important method that was devised was the integrated library system. This to a great extent was elaborated at the Sixth National Seminar of the Indian Adult Education Association wherein librarians and adult educationists were brought together to devise ways and means of working in collaboration with each other.

In recent year, however, one of the biggest hurdles in literacy programmes, that provision of literature for neo-literates, has at last begun to receive the serious attention that it demands. Not only has an enormous amount of literature been produced during the period under review but there also appears to be a keener awareness of the problems involved in the production of literature. Some of the Seminars convened by Unesco have greatly helped in this and the adoption of a major project on this subject at Ninth General Assembly of Unesco held last year at New Delhi is certainly a great step in the direction. A pioneering study, sponsored by Unesco on the subject, has just been completed by a team of experts under the joint auspices of the Indian Adult Education Association and the Jamia Millia which should greatly help in the production of proper literature.

Community Centres

Another programme that has proved considerably popular is the organisation of community centres. The community centre was conceived as a means to create a community consciousness among people and arouse among them through various activities a spirit of self-help. The Second National Seminar of the Indian Adult Education Association in 1951 went into great detail regarding the organisation of community centres. It considered the purposes of community centres, the various activities it ought to undertake and the techniques to be adopted in organising activities. It pointed out the necessity of "developing a centre round the felt needs of the community" rather than "providing a ready made pattern particularly in the rural areas."

Since then the community centre idea has caught on. For instance in the community development areas alone, there are to-day about fifty thousand centres.

How effective have these been? The latest Report of the Programmes Evaluation Board leaves no room for satisfaction. "Readiness to go in for community centres", the Report points out, "are generally speaking, least successful", and calculating the coverage of the population by this programme, the Board has estimated that the average number of *active* community centres was fourteen per hundred thousand. The centres, the Report points out further, relapse into inactivity after an initial

period of activity. One reason for this failure of the Centres to strike roots among the villagers that the Report has highlighted is the fact that centres are run to standardised patterns which do not permit variations to suit local genius or needs.

A new experiment that has come into vogue regarding the running of the community centres is the school-cum-community centre. This provides for the school to undertake the responsibility of the community centre which it is hoped would not only re-stitute the school in the heart of the community but also provide a suitable agency for the organisation of the community centre. This innovation is yet on an experimental level and the outcome of the experience of some of the five-hundred centres that have been sponsored by the Ministry of Education is well worth watching.

Janata College

Another institutional programme that came into meteoric prominence during this decade is the Janata College. It came into existence as inspiration from the Folk Schools of Denmark and was tried out in 1946 by the Mysore State Adult Education Council. Since then they have caught the imagination of adult education workers all over India, though Sardar Sohan Singh with good reasons points out that they have not caught the imagination of the people.*

Many reasons have been responsible for the

*Ibid

failure of the Janata Colleges to strike roots among the people. One thing was pointed out by the Seminar sponsored by the Ministry of Education in 1955. It said :

“It may be mentioned in this connection that some Janata colleges, instead of educating the village leaders, are functioning as training centres for teachers, organisers and workers of social education and community centres and have instituted diploma course. Their course of training is generally directed towards employment or situations, such as those of social education organisers in NES blocks, social education instructors under the educated unemployment relief scheme and paid workers in charge of community centres.”

whereas the Janta College is a

“type of institution distinct from the existing types of educational institutions and its growth and expansion should be visualised as a part of popular countrywide movement for providing civic consciousness and social and cultural enlightenment for the common man and helping him to become a responsible member of democratic society. It should enable him to exercise his franchise properly, to play an effective role in the all round development of the community life and to acquire a sense of national understanding”.

The Janata Colleges, by and large, have failed to

concentrate on one objective—that of training rural leaders and has tended to tackle variety of jobs such as craft training, agricultural extension etc. with the result that its role in the rural society has been without a specific orientation.

Social Education in Urban Areas

Developments in social education have been primarily in rural areas and for the very good reason that the development of rural areas have been first concern of the nation. But the end of the decade under review has also brought into picture the problem of social education in urban areas. There has been a growing feeling among social education workers that if no effort was made to anticipate the urbanising influences that would follow the industrial accent of the Second Five Year Plan, its aftermath would be difficult to keep under control. Thus at the Seventh National Seminar of the Indian Adult Education Association held in 1956, the question was considered by the delegates. Based on these discussions, memorandum was also submitted to Ministry of Education suggesting various measures to step up social education programmes in urban areas.

One of the most important steps in this direction is the suggestion for the setting up of coordinating councils for social education. In the big cities, social welfare services are not totally absent. The Ministry of Education have appreciated the basic idea behind coordinating councils which would help to mobilise social service resources and focus them to

definite ends. But the Ministry's decision to recommend that the State Governments should take necessary steps in the direction is doubtful in its wisdom. Had they instead enabled a non-official agency to undertake this responsibility, it would have been more expeditious and efficient.

Workers' education has also begun to attract considerable attention. An International Team visited India at the instance of the Government and its recommendations to set up Boards for the purpose have been endorsed by the Seminar of all those concerned with the problem. Here again, to what extent workers' education would be effective remains yet to be seen for the objectives of workers' education as recommended by the Team and accepted by the Seminar appear to many to be unsuitable to Indian conditions. To assume that workers' education is synonymous with trade union education is to simplify a rather complex problem. This problem is, however, being considered at the Eighth National Seminar of the Indian Adult Education Association.

The Future

This, in a sketchy outline, is a retrospect of social education since the concept came into existence. The experience has been varied but rich.

What is its meaning ?

One thing stands out clearly. Social education has been tending to orient itself to goals which are of fundamental importance to a community wherein

social change marks the crux of its further development. This change is all pervasive and extends from a change in the social structure to a change in the traditionally accepted modes and values. Social relationships, methods of production, are all in the process of change. The role of social education in this complex situation is acquiring clarity. It has come to be recognised increasingly that social education should concern itself with social problems that hinder the process of social change. Whether social education will succeed in this task will depend on the measure of insight the workers and administrators possess. For us that objective alone will ensure happiness and prosperity of the Indian people.