

RURAL ADULT EDUCATION*

WHEN we contrast the demands which democracy makes upon the citizens of a State with the actual condition of education in the different countries of Asia, the picture is one of grave and anxious concern. It is true that in some exceptional cases the problem has been largely mastered. We have Japan which, according to figures available for 1946, has a literacy figure of 99%. Lebanon in the Middle East is also reputed to have a high literacy figure. Turkey has for 1945-46 literacy of 60% in towns and 40% in villages. Philippines with its figure of 52.6% is also comparatively well placed. The same remarks would apply to Ceylon, Thailand, Burma and China. We cannot, however, gauge the magnitude of the problem by percentages alone. China has a literacy figure of over 50%. If we take the total population of China to be 450 millions, this would give an adult population of about 225 millions. It is unlikely that the percentage of literacy will be the same for adults as for children and adolescents. Even if this questionable assumption is granted, the number of adult illiterates in China would be some 125 millions.

If we take the figures for India, we find that in pre-partition India, the total number of literates according to the 1941 census was 37 millions. Assuming that the number of adult literates is about 40% of the total number of literates, this gives a figure a little over 15 millions. This refers only to the pre-partition Indian provinces, but we may put the figures for adult literates after partition at roughly 11 millions. To this we have to add the number of adult literates in the States. This is estimated to be about 6 millions. The number of adult literates in India on the basis of 1941 census is therefore approximately 17 millions against a total adult population of about 180 millions, which gives a literacy percentage for adults slightly less than 10. This is not only unsatisfactory but positively disturbing. Naturally the Government of

India propose to give first priority to a programme of Social Education in its schemes of educational development for the country.

We require in India about a million teachers for dealing with children of school-going age who constitute only about 12½% of the total population. For the adult illiterates who will amount to almost 50% of the population, we would, even on the same basis, require about 4 million teachers.

If we also make allowance for the higher ratio necessary in their case, the number of teachers required may amount to almost 5 millions. Against this, we can, of course, balance the factor that the adult education courses will perhaps last for about 3 months at a time for the first stage of literacy. Even then, the number of teachers to be continually employed on it will be over a million.

To find the million teachers for school children is difficult enough, but if we have to find another million for our programmes of adult education, the problem becomes almost insuperable. But we are considering in India the possibility of utilising the basic school teacher for our programme of Social Education. We are also examining a proposal to use some kind of social conscription by which all educated persons will be required to contribute this national service for a specified period. If all students after matriculation are compelled to teach for even six months, this would, of course, go some way towards helping the solution, but even then the gap to be overcome would be considerable.

There is also the question how far basic school teachers or young collegians will prove suitable for such a programme of National Education. Teaching small children requires in the teacher certain habits and attitudes which he may not be able to shed when addressing adults. Similarly, it is a problem whether young men and women just out of school will have the necessary patience and insight to be successful teachers of adults. It is to be hoped that the different aspects of this intricate question will be carefully gone into and recommendations made so as to be of use to us and other Asian countries.

* Abstract of the Inaugural Address by the Hon'ble Maulana Abul Kalam Azad at UNESCO Seminar on Rural Adult Education, Mysore, India, on the 2nd November 1949.