

One of the major aims of the Third Plan is "to expand and intensify the educational effort and to bring every home within its fold". For the achievement of this goal as far as it relates to primary education, provision has been made in the Plan for facilities for the education of all children in the age-group 6-11, adequate training of teachers, special efforts for the education of girls and orientation of all elementary schools to the basic pattern. The importance of this goal and the magnitude of the task set for the nation led the Planning Commission to ask the P.E.O. to undertake a study of the problems of extension of primary education in the rural areas.

The elements that go to constitute the structure of primary education are the school, teachers, students, parents, the community and the school administration. This structure is expected to function according to the goal, content and method of primary education. The system thus conceived has been taken as the frame for this study; and in formulating its objectives and scope, the programme and efforts emphasised in the Third Plan have been kept in view. By and large, our attempt has been to go behind the quantitative measures of the progress of primary education in the rural areas and obtain an insight into the more important problems and difficulties standing in the way of its universalisation and improvement. In view of the emphasis on depth, the study of such a vast field had perforce to be selective in focus and based on investigations in purposively chosen districts—on an average one per State.

The findings of the study, reported in this volume, indicate that during the Plan era there has been substantial progress in the opening of schools, expansion of facilities, recruitment of teachers and enrolment of children, including Harijan children. It has not, however, been an unmixed achievement. The expansion has raised or accentuated a number of problems such as inadequacy of the physical plant of the school, relatively slow progress in the training of teachers, problems of text books, lagging enrolment among landless labourers and tenants, a heavy burden of stagnation and drop-out, near-stagnation in the field of basic education, weakness in school-community relations and a low level of teachers' participation in developmental activities. The diverse findings of this study have been discussed in different chapters of the report and summarised in the last one.

Some of the basic issues thrown up by this study have been referred to in the concluding paragraphs. Some of these relate to the adoption of a uniform period of schooling (five years) for primary education, provision of assistance in the form of free or subsidised books, stationery and uniform to the children of the economically weaker sections and special attention to the problems of these groups. By far the most important issue that this study poses is regarding the objective and content of elementary education whether of the traditional primary brand or of its basic-oriented version. Apparently, this matter has not received due attention from any high-level body in recent years. It is hoped that it would receive adequate consideration from the Education Commission appointed by the Education Ministry.

The P.E.O. has received advice and help from a number of agencies at different stages of this study. The adviser on Primary Education, Ministry of Education, and the Chief of the Education Division of the Planning Commission provided valuable ideas and suggestions at the time of the planning of the enquiry. The Directors of Education of the State Governments and their staff at different levels have extended cooperation and help in the course of the conduct of the enquiry. Advice, help and cooperation received from these and other sources are thankfully acknowledged.

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