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NON-FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION AS AN ENTRY POINT  
FOR COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

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Non-formal education  
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1. Definitions

" Nonformal education is by its very nature, capable of being more flexible, more appropriately linked to learners' and community needs, more closely in touch with the priorities in each locality. Its varying duration, the diversification of its contents, its linkage to local resources and its lower costs make it a particularly appropriate tool for the promotion of democratic rural reconstruction."<sup>1</sup>

" Nonformal education is ~~simply~~ a convenient label covering a bewildering assortment of organized educational activities outside the formal system that are intended to serve identifiable learning needs of particular subgroups in any given population -- be they children, youths, or adults; males or females; farmers, merchants or craftsmen; affluent or poor families.

The learning needs of these groups are extremely diverse; they include but extend well beyond those customarily catered to by formal schools or colleges. Hence the chief distinguishing characteristic of non-formal education, viewed as a whole, is its much greater flexibility, versatility, and adaptability than formal education for meeting the diverse learning needs of virtually any kind of clientele, and for changing as the needs change."<sup>2</sup>

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"It is estimated that roughly half of the present educational effort in the developing countries is in the nonformal sector. Collectively, these programs exhibit characteristics indispensable to development. For example, they tend to arise in response to immediate needs; they are usually related to action and use; they tend to be short term rather than long; they have a variety of sponsors, both public and private; and they tend to be responsive to local community requirements. More importantly, nonformal education shows strong potential for getting at the human condition of those most likely to be excluded from the formal schools, the poor, the isolated, the rural, the illiterate, the unemployed and the under-employed, for being carried on in the context of limited resources, and for being efficient in terms of time and cost.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. An Approach to Adult Education

In recent years Adult Education is also accepted as a medium in contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development. Just to quote from the Declaration of Persepolis:-

"Literacy to be not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man and to his full development. Thus conceived, literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of its aims; it also stimulates initiative and his participation in the creation of projects capable of acting upon the world, of transforming it, and of defining the aims of

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authentic human development. It should open the way to a mastery of techniques and human relations. Literacy is not an end in itself. It is a fundamental human right."<sup>4</sup>

This clearly defines that the narrow definition of adult education or non-formal education has changed its complexion. Even the policy statement of the National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) outlines much wider implications. The statements says:

- that illiteracy is a serious impediment to an individual's growth and to the country's socio-economic progress;
- that education is not co-terminus with schooling but takes place in most work and life situations;
- that learning, working and living each acquires a meaning only when correlated with the others;
- that the means by which people are involved in the process of development are at least as important as the ends; and
- that the illiterate and the poor can rise to their own liberation through literacy, dialogue and action.<sup>5</sup>

With these kinds of assumptions and new understanding about adult education, adult education can act as a good entry point for community organisation. But the way it should be operationalised needs careful planning. It cannot be a simple literacy programme or a training in functional knowledge but a process through which the people may learn to realize their potential, understand their own reality and begin to think of organizing themselves for some action.

3. Organising of an Adult Education Programme by an implementing Organisation or Group.

It is very simple to organise a programme which has a simple objective e.g. to make people literate through an adult education centre, but it is very difficult if the objectives of the programme are more comprehensive and basically lead the community towards its own development. One of the first activities which needs to be organised for an adult education programme with the objectives outlined in the previous section, the organisation has to create a process to understand the community for which the programme is going to be organised. Even before this the organisation has to prepare their own workers in understanding the community as well as forces which act on a community. Unless they are observant about the forces they would not be able to understand the phenomena of development. This may help them in developing the curriculum as well as resources for the programme. Many processes are used to understand the community such as surveys or collecting secondary data about the area. But these kinds of sources only provide superficial knowledge about the community. Hence, it is much better to send the workers to spend a large part of a fortnight to live with the community and be with the people. The participatory research process will provide a better knowledge about the community.

Another important task for organising the programme is collection of material which would be used for the educational programme. As literacy is an important component of adult education programmes, the organisation may have to choose a primer which provide a basis for not only learning the literacy skills but also other aspects of functional knowledge. At present many organisations have developed primer materials

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which may help in achieving the objectives outlined in the previous section. In such cases the learning of alphabate also starts with the discussion on the key words. Most of the key words are emotionally charged words which can generate a good discussion among the participants of the adult education centre. If some groups are interested to provide materials with certain definite objectives they may have to develop their own materials. Primer materials can include a primer, a set of charts, writing exercise books, discussion sheets, flash-cards etc. Similarly, many adult education programmes supplementary materials. These materials can help in building the knowledge component even without learning the reading skills. As the objectives of adult education centre are such that at later stage will help in community organisation and community development, it is important to collect such cultural materials which may provide a source to the participants in generating concepts like co-operations, truth, courage, etc.,. These may be in the form of songs, poetry and social dramas. Other supplementary materials needed for the programme may be related to information regarding development programmes.

To organise the programme the organisation may have to develop a team of workers who can conduct the programme. Although there is a project outline provided by the Government of India to organise adult education programme, the staffing pattern is good for a project of 300 or 150, 60 or 30 adult education centres. Recently the Government of India has made a provision such that an organisation can start a project with as small as 5 centres. For 300 centres there is a team of one project officer, two assistant project officers and ten supervisors with a small support staff. This staff can handle

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the general nature of the project but when the organisation intends to organise the programme with a specific objective of bringing people out from cultural of silence, the organisation has to prepare this team of workers into a dynamic group which can start adult education programme for the project area. One thing is important to understand here, when we suggest that it should be a team because this we feel the learning activity should not remain at the adult education centre but it should extend to the homes and places of work of the participants. The centre has to be concerned with the life of the people who are participating in the programme. The learning and living has to become co-terminus. This puts a lot of demands on the team of workers and hence it is important that each member of the team has to play a larger role - more as a community animator rather than a supervisor, or a project officer.

#### 4. Creating an Environment for the Programme.

One of the most important aspects of adult education programme is creating an environment about the programme. The basic factor in creating an environment is the involvement of all people concerned whether they are going to participate at the centre or not. This becomes much more important when one sees this programme with larger objectives. In earlier days whenever adult education programme was started the planning of the project was done by consulting the Block Development Officer or the elected chief and by collecting statistics sitting in their offices. In this process officials were involved at different levels. This created a programme whose need was established by outsiders from the community for the community. The programme was not of people in any sense as

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it was neither planned by them and nor when they were involved in it. Hence, this kind of programme could not have led to community organisation later after the end of the academic cycle.

In creating an environment the first step for the workers is to spend a long duration of time with people. They should explain the objectives of the programme clearly. They should also involve other people from the community in helping them to spread the word. The programme needs to be seen as an instrument of social change. This means increasing the understanding of the people as well as the social environment of the area. One of the example which can be quoted here was done by our organisation. It was called Seva Mandir Literacy Conciousness Walk. The whole area was divided into 10 zones and a group of workers went through the area organising meetings on the wells, farms, tea shops, open mines etc. In many cases big evening meetings were organised in a central village at the cross roads. Sometimes the meetings were supplemented by puppet shows or film shows but in most cases the local people were involved to participate in explaining the objectives of the programme. The local elected leaders and established leaders were also involved in the programme. In most cases we explained that adult education programme is a beginning for starting a programme of development. These meetings were also used to involve the community in deciding whether they would like to participate in the programme. This opportunity was also used in creating a group or a peoples committee at the village level which may take up responsibility to support the programme. Also suggestions were taken from the community to provide names of those peoples who can work as adult education instructors. The involvement of the community was also asked.

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for the place to run the centre and looking after day to day needs of the centre. In some cases the supervision of the centre was also given to the group. This way it was ensured that people will have some share of responsibility with the adult education centre. This method created a good environment in the area.

There may be several methods of creating involvement in the area but one thing must be kept in mind that in doing such an activity, people of that area should be involved and the objectives of the programme should be explained clearly to the people so that taking all further programmes of community organisation may be developed later.

5. Training Programmes for Workers and Adult Education Instructors.

The training of the workers is one of the most important aspect of adult education. The three fold of objectives e.g. literacy, functional knowledge and consciousness raising have to be understood by the workers and the adult education instructors.

We have mentioned that it is important for the programme of adult education that it emphasises the conscious participation of the masses in identifying and solving the socio-economic problems which hamper individual and national development. Such participation improves awareness of restrictive socio-economic circumstances and critically analyse of their nature so as to find solutions to problems by acquisition and use of new socio-economic techniques including literacy. Hence, the training programme and the methodology has to develop techniques of working with people on a footing of equality and in an atmosphere of shared

learning. As the urge for a change has to come from within the each learner there is a need to create an environment conducive to "learning for change". The nature of the training has to be participatory and it should provide an opportunity for mutual learning "The medium is the message!". Another important component for the training should be such that the learning should emerge from experiences of the learner. There should be a real effort to create such a situation for the trainee to understand the field and its realities. The experience in training should be such that it is more an experience in community living. One of the important thing which the training should do is to take some steps towards value clarifications. He or she should questions such things as: "Do I have faith in the basic strength of the people"? "Do I seek to serve"? "Do I believe in equality and social justice without consideration of race, sex, caste and creed"? "Do I know the nature of the social and economic privileges that I enjoyed and others do not"? "Would I be ready to surrender some of these privileges for the common good"? etc. These kinds of questions may be handled during the training programmes.

Some of the methods which should be used during the training are as follows:-

1. Self-study. etc.
2. Lecture-cum-demonstration.
3. Discussion methods.
4. Literacy teaching through demonstration.
5. Practice teaching.
6. Cases study method.

7. Activity base methods such as field visits, project workshops etc.
8. Problem solving exercises.

The nature of the use of these methods will be based on the objectives, content and the participants. As we are also thinking about training of the adult education instructor who have less formal education, we may have to work very hard in preparing for the material as well as the method of the training. In most of these trainings, process is very important. The learning will go deeper if the process is socio-psychological in nature. The backgrounds of these adult education instructors is such that one time training would not help them to do the work very well. The training should be treated as a continuous process. The initial training is just a beginning to open the hearts and minds of these people. It lays down the foundations, skills and understanding to become a continuous learner. The field would be able to give them more questions in their mind to think about how they can themselves become instrument to change.

The adult education instructor should be given every possible chance to learn further about the problems that they face. This could be done through monthly meetings individual help by the supervisors after visiting the adult education instructor or even holding a small in-service trainings.

There is another way of learning i.e. materials, which can be sent from the project offices so that they can read the material and think about new ideas on their own for their centres.

5. Implimenting the Programme

At the village level the rural adult education centre starts with a small formal group. It is expected that about 20 - 30 adults will come together in a adult education centre. At the centre, learning literacy would be an important component of the adult education centre, the number of people who would come together as a group to learn how to read and write, will also be exposed to those issues which are directly related to their lives.

Many primers are developed on the basis of functional knowledge needed for the communities. In these primers the programme starts with the discussion on a problem or a issue so that through discussion people may be able to understand the problem or the issue. Also through key words they learn how to read and write. The key issue also open the awareness aspects of the group members. Sometime the adult education centre can become a forum for the community where several activities can take place. An activity which is based on information could be organised for the total community. A word could be sent that there will be session which should be useful for the total community so that the whole community could start associating with the centre as a important place for useful information. It is not merely a literacy class. Similarly it should also organise social events so that many learnings in the area of social development can be taken by the centre. Another important activity which should be organised by the centre is a cultural programme. The centre should become a place where people could associate themselves as a place where they can become part of a cultural society. Many such cultural programmes can be used for developing a

new value system. Several organisations have used adult education centres as the platform for such cultural educational activities.

The instructor and people's committees, the help of the project workers and development departments can also develop some special programmes for the community. These may be based on the needs of the community for example forest campaigns, eye camps, animal husbandry camps etc. Similarly, development machinery people may visit adult education centre and use it as a place for providing information about the new development schemes.

In achieving the three fold objectives of literacy, functional knowledge and awareness - raising the supervisors and project officer have to support the instructors. The supervisor is the key person who supervises the centre such that he could support the instructor in literacy teaching, arranging programmes of functional knowledge by bringing resource people or providing materials and generally manages the administration of the centres. Through several methods such as monthly meetings, visits and problem-solving sessions the supervisor can generate such a relation with instructors that they may feel him as a "comrade-in-arms". A good supervisor can bring out the best in an instructor and help him/her to grow in ability and motivation for the work. In implementing an adult education project a supervisor also plays a link role between the field and the project office.

#### 7. Some other Activities

The adult education programme this way can initiate a process within the community to take up several programmes.

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These programmes can start a process within the community to associate themselves with the development programmes. Several communities after finishing adult literacy programmes have continued activities which are known as follow up programmes. In these follow-up or continuing programmes the literacy group takes up action and analysis on other issues e.g. some communities have formed what they call "self-help groups". These self-help groups have created credit unions which help them in their day-to-day credit needs, but these meetings also help them to come together to think about their own social and economic environment. In some of the areas many communities have come together (particularly tribal communities) to build a community centre. They have contributed in building the centre so that it can become a focus-point for the community for many activities which they would like to continue, such as credit union meetings, women group meeting, childrens non-formal education programme, place to store of agriculture assets collectively purchased, place for holding community meeting, place for outside people who were coming to visit the village and other social events such as marriage or other social functions. Similarly some community groups have taken up construction of community wells so that they can have a good drinking water supply. In some cases where a whole group of people used to work on road construction site, they have taken some issues related to minimum wage, similarly one women group had taken a issue on sexual harrasment by the mate etc. In two groups, most of the people were weavers and they got organised to develop a weaving centre to improve their skills. In all these cases such step can only be taken if right from the beginning the animators are prepared to think that adult

education programme is not merely a programme of literacy, but a means to lay the foundation to organise the community for their own development.

In summary, an adult education programme provides an opportunity for a group of people to come together at one place for a period of 10 to 12 months. This meeting takes place almost every day of the week. This opportunity can be exploited to make people understand slowly but steadily about their own environment. In early stages, the understanding may remain at the information or knowledge levels, but later it can be used for action in terms of community organisation. We feel that such a project which starts with the people and involves them with the programme at different stages can create an environment in which the people can be initiated in people - oriented development activities.

8. Why Adult Education is a good entry point for Community organizing.

Adult Education is a good entry point for community organizing, and it is good for the community, for the leadership, and for the implementing organization, group or animator team.

The learner group that comes together to work together to work together on one or two problems of poverty (illiteracy, lack of agriculture knowledge) and experiences the value of working at things in groups, gains confidence and desire in continuing to work together. In itself, the first year of the adult education centre will not make a significant change in the poor and exploitive conditions

in the area, but we have found it to be a good beginning. People gain confidence, get into the habit of meeting together, come in contact with a voluntary organization prepared to help them, and in this way lay the foundation for future action.

Through leadership training and group training programmes the people come in contact with government officers in charge of programmes that are supposed to be for the poor. They get some glimpse of schemes and resources that could be brought to their area. This exposure through the adult education centre, in itself starts people thinking about further action. Not only do the people see resources in government departments outside the village, they begin to see resources in their own midst. Adult education centre groups have gone on, together, to build community centres, to start small credit unions, to clean up their villages and homes -- without any intervention from any government department.

Leadership for future work in the area can also be identified and developed through the medium of adult education. In implementing an adult education programme, young people are identified, trained and supported in leadership roles in running a programme in which literacy, functional knowledge, and awareness-building are the content. Many of these young people become involved with the problems of the poor of their area, and if even some of them show interest and aptitude in providing continuing leadership among the poor of their area, then there is a network of contact people and leaders for further action on issues affecting the poor. There is a

kind of self-selection process in which those who are interested become visible by their own interest and ability, and it is not difficult to identify them.

Leadership skills can be developed during the course of the adult education programme. For one thing, the task of being an adult education centre instructor is specific enough, structured enough, that it provides a framework for the local person to work within a programme which gives him/her enough guidance about what to do while he/she gains confidence in leadership, as well as giving enough freedom to build on local issues if and when the people and the instructor are ready to do so. The in-service training programmes, and the monthly meetings help the instructor to grow in understanding of problem-solving, and to increase knowledge about issues that effect the area.

The monthly meetings and the continuing supervision of the centres in the area allow the implementing organization or organizers to keep in touch with the current conditions and problems of the area. The close contact with the area over most of 1 year allows the organizers to get a feel for the social, political, economic life of the people. This preparation of the organizers is important if they are to help to guide future organizing work in the area.

Adult Education is a good medium for organizing the community because it gives a lot of scope for involving the community in committees and meetings in the course of the running of the centre. The idea of forming an adult education committee to support the centre is a useful one. This committee would share the responsibility of solving small

problems that come up in the course of running the centre. These will include negotiations about space for the centre, encouraging regular attendance, and helping the total community to make the centre their own. If the adult education centre attracts younger adults, the adult education committee, being a group of adults, will give the nucleus and the base for a group of older adults to begin to meet regularly to talk about learning and organizing needs of their community. But the committee is only one point of contact with the community as a whole. The "chetna yatras" or "awareness building motivational walks", the community functions that can be organized by the centres on national festivals and holidays, and the opening and closing functions of the centre itself allow the community to come together to think about society, education, organization and action.

And finally, as a medium to begin work with the poor, the adult education centre is a good entry point. Illiteracy and lack of numeracy skills, are characteristics of the poor. The rich classes and upper castes have usually acquired some numeracy and literacy skills. So, as a basis for building a group and community effort amongst the poor, the adult education centre is a good beginning. The activity, almost by definition, will exclude the richer groups.

Indeed, after 10-12 years experience in Seva Mandir, we find that adult education is as good as any, and better than most, as an entry point for continuing work with the poor and for providing a base for further community organization.

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