

PROBLEMS OF
PRIMARY EDUCATION IN INDIA

A STUDY

BY

S. C. BASU, M.A.,

District Inspector of Schools, Calcutta

With An Introduction By

E. F. OATEN, M.A., LL.B. (CANTAB)

Director of Public Instruction, Bengal

PUBLISHED BY

SEN BROTHERS & CO.,

PUBLISHERS AND BOOKSELLERS,

15, College Square,

CALCUTTA

Price Rupee One

PUBLISHED BY B. N. SEN,
15, COLLEGE SQUARE, CALCUTTA.

KUNTALINE PRESS,
61, BOWBAZAR STREET, CALCUTTA.
PRINTED BY P. C. DASS.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

This study of the problems of primary education in India is based on official reports and the publications of Christian Missions, and is intended for those who are interested in the subject but have not the time to go through the literature referred to. Where different views exist I have presented them faithfully, and have refrained from subscribing to any particular view.

Certain fundamental difficulties are already manifest in carrying out the programmes adopted in different provinces for a fight against illiteracy under the voluntary system of education, and careful experiments alone can show the way out. Christian Missions, which led the way in higher education in this country and interested themselves in the organization of primary education a quarter of a century before the State assumed responsibility in this direction (*vide* First report on primary education in Bengal, by E. E. Biss, P. 12), appear also to have taken the lead in vitalising the work of present-day primary schools. Already a large body of valuable experiences is available. These are derived from experiments conducted in different parts of the country. Non-Christians vastly exceed the Christians among the pupils in the mission schools, and the Missions have recognised that any educational policy they adopt must necessarily take the huge non-Christian number into account (*vide* Report of the missionary conference on industrial education in India held at Allahabad in March, 1924, P. 9—published by the National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon). The general characteristics of mission primary schools, *viz.*, one-teacher school, small attendance, over-lapping of schools and small

proportion of trained teachers are also those of non-mission schools. The lines of improvement which the Missions have undertaken must, therefore, be of interest and value to those concerned with non-mission education. This is the view of no less an authority than Sir Michael Sadler who, in commending the Report of the Missionary Commission on village education in India, 1919-20, remarked that "not only the missionary societies of the United Kingdom and of North America, but the Government of India and the Indian provincial administrators will find guidance in the Report."

The account of the progress of compulsory primary education given in chapter I needs modification in view of the fact, which has been made public since a large part of the manuscript was in type, that in the United Provinces compulsory primary education for boys is to be enforced in 23 municipalities and that the Chittagong municipality, in Bengal, is ready to adopt compulsion.

I am indebted to the Rev. W. Paton, Secretary to the National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon, for the kindly help he has given me with suggestions regarding the recent mission experiments and by placing at my disposal some publications related thereto.

I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. E. F. Oaten, Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, for kindly writing the Introduction to this little book and for the generous terms in which he refers to my effort.

I regret the occurrence of some typographical errors, a list of which is given at the end of this study.

CALCUTTA.

November, 1925.

S. C. BASU.

INTRODUCTION.

There is a very widespread ignorance on the subject of Primary Education in India. A necessary preliminary to the creation of a sound public opinion on the subject is an increase of knowledge. Without that knowledge the demand for an advance towards the standards of Europe and America in respect of mass education is made without realisation of the implications of the problem. It is all to the good that the knowledge which must form the basis of any constructive thought or action in connexion with the greatest of all problems which now face the educational reformer in India should be made easily accessible.

Mr. S. C. Basu brings a varied experience to his task. He was educated in a University in America, that country which has itself grappled with immense problems in rural education, and has in consequence been able to supply the world with sound thinkers and workers on the problem, from which India among other countries has directly benefited. He has been a professor of Political Economy in an Indian college, and is therefore not likely to underrate the economic difficulties in the way of compulsory primary education. Finally he has been an Inspector of Schools, in which capacity he has been able to study the schools at first hand, and realise their pitiful inadequacy, and the immensity of the problem which still awaits a solution. With such an unusual combination of varied experiences, Mr. Basu should *prima facie* be in a position to enable his readers, even though they may

not have time to read blue books or reports, to glimpse at least the dim outline of the subject with some feeling of security that they are not being given false or distorted impressions.

†— The problem of primary education can be summed up in a few questions. How shall we pay for the schools needed? What shall we teach in these schools? Ought we to compel all boys to attend, present feeling and present conditions being what they are? Can we possibly extend such compulsion to girls? How can we get the necessary teachers trained? Who shall pay for their training? Shall primary education be free or should fees be charged? What type of school shall we build? Who should control and administer these schools? How should the necessary money be raised, by provincial or by local taxation? And last, and most fundamental of all, can the country, in its present economic condition, support universal primary education? ²

It is easy to ask these questions. The man who can answer them has not solved the problem, because he has to persuade or legally compel his fellows to accept his answers, but he has gone some way towards understanding it.

To some of these questions answers will be found in this short survey. A specially interesting chapter of Mr. Basu's book is that in which he deals with the question of the adjustment of education to the pupil's environment. He cites some of the valuable experiments which the Missions, to which Indian education owes so much, are making. As I read his chapter, I recalled to my mind a passage from a recent report :

"Gifted boys from the unprivileged classes and particularly from the agricultural population are

attracted to the high school. Years of leisure for these children are often provided by parents who are scarcely able to bear the burden, and a costly form of instruction is provided by the State. What is the return on this expenditure? These young people whether they leave before or after graduation forsake the life of their own people, develop a contempt for manual labour, seek membership in the intellectual occupations, drift to the towns and cities, and in many instances prey upon their more ignorant fellows. They lose all desire to participate in those basic economic activities of agriculture and industry which have been the support of man since he emerged from barbarism, and which must remain his chief support for generations to come. They get no satisfaction from handling the plow, hammer and saw, but seek salaried positions in professions, commerce or Government office. To be sure, individuals must be prepared for such occupations, but no school that points in this direction can adequately defend the policy of attracting large numbers of pupils."

This was written in 1925 in an official report on education in the Phillipine Islands. The passage referred of course to secondary education. A similar failure of adjustment between the school and the social environment has taken place in regard to secondary education in India. A second failure, different in character, but equally disastrous in result, is possible in primary education in Bengal, if a great move forward is attempted before all its implications and needs have been fully thought out and the necessary adjustments made. Primary education among a population like that of rural Bengal should possibly mean something more than literacy only, and by

making valuable experiments the Missions are attempting to ascertain and demonstrate what this "something more" is or may be. The report on the Phillippine education system referred to above says: "A first great purpose of the industrial work (in elementary schools) may be said to have been achieved. It has been established without question that the work contributes substantially to elevating standards of living and to teaching the control of some of the means by which standards of living are maintained. It has been demonstrated that it is fundamentally sound as a part of the common school system." How far this applies, or can be made to apply, to India can be demonstrated only by experiment, but obviously there is a vast field of exploration and constructive thought and action. It comes, however, as a damper to be told by Mr. Basu, what is doubtless perfectly true, that the parent is not in the least attracted by a ruralised curriculum. It is however some consolation to remember that the parent is not always right.

For the rest of Mr. Basu's book, I must introduce it without comment, merely expressing my satisfaction that one more stone has been thrown into the pond of apathy in which the subject is generally immersed. For in this matter of primary education, the public conscience must never be allowed to rest, but must be roused from sleep as often as possible. In the words of an enthusiast quoted by Mr. Basu we must "keep on preaching education and have all our pastors and preachers and workers continually preaching it and drumming it into the ears of the people." So only will the way be prepared.

CALCUTTA.

November, 9, 1925.

E. F. OATEN.

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION: By E. F. Oaten, Esq., M.A., LL.B.
(Cantab), Director of Public Instruction, Bengal
. pp. iii—vi

CHAPTER I. The general problem of expansion of literacy.

Expansion of literacy under the existing voluntary system is slow and uncertain. Introduction of compulsion is a possible solution. Permissive legislation to this effect has proved practically ineffectual. Expansion in rural areas has reached a stage at which multiplication of the existing type of schools appears to prove largely ineffectual and uneconomic pp. 1—4

CHAPTER II. Why growth in school attendance is disproportionate to the supply of educational facilities.

Growth in attendance is still very largely determined by the participation of traditionally literate classes, and in breaking down illiteracy one of the chief difficulties encountered is the persistent non-participation of great classes of urban as well as rural population. Causes of this non-participation: (1) Unwillingness or indifference of parents, (2) economic difficulty and (3) the boys being required to help their parents in the family occupations or to earn a living pp. 5—8

CHAPTER III. The question of vocational training in the primary stage.

A prevailing theory is that provision of vocational training will lessen unwillingness or indifference of parents. Divergent views on the

question of agricultural as well as industrial education in primary schools. The artisan schools, which combine primary education with industrial training. The position in the Punjab. A better position in Madras, Bengal, Central Provinces and Assam pp. 9—13

CHAPTER IV. Educational Handwork.

Handwork, as such, is not directed to a definite vocation and is advocated on educational grounds. The educational objective in handwork admits of partial play of the economic motive in it, and the work need not consist of useless things. Missions' experiments in handwork: (1) At the Darnakal Institute, (2) at the Scottish Churches mission school, Kalimpong, (3) at the Industrial Orphanage, Baranagore, (4) at the Australian Baptist mission school, Faridpur, and (5) at the American Baptist mission school, Bhimpore, Midnapore pp. 14—21

CHAPTER V. Adjustment of education to the child's environment.

Ruralisation of the village primary course will, it is contended, popularise village education. The problem of ruralisation is one, not so much of reforming the curriculum as, of teacher-training. The unsatisfactory state of school-gardening. The possibilities of the right method of nature study, as shown at the mission school, Kalimpong. Infusing a social spirit into the working of the school has been suggested as a means of making rural education attractive. From this point of view the *Project Method* of instruction has been initiated at the mission school at Moga, Punjab. Experiments in the project method: (1) At the American

Lutheran mission school, Guntur, (2) at the American Baptist mission school, Bhimpore, Midnapore, and (3) at the mission school, Darnakal (in the Nizam's Dominion). The community work of the rural schools in the United States and their lessons for India. . . pp. 22—35

CHAPTER VI. The economic difficulty as a hindrance to the expansion of literacy.

The problem is not merely one of remission of fees. Fees form only a small part of the cost of education. In the opinion of some observers the employment of child labour is widespread in India. While poverty is a cause of non-attendance at school, lack of education is one of the causes of poverty. Experiments to meet the difficulty arising out of poverty and employment of child labour : (1) Half-time schools, (2) short-term schools tried by Missions, (3) the expedient of giving a grant to the child equal to his earning capacity resorted to by some Missions and (4) school meals provided at some mission schools pp. 36—40

CHAPTER VII. The problem of the growth of literacy being not proportionate to growth in school attendance.

The duration of school life is in many cases too short to make a lasting impression. School life is too often marked by stagnation. Attendance is in many cases casual. Relapse into illiteracy. Experiments to solve the problem of stagnation : the *Word Method* as distinguished from the alphabetic method of Reading. The *Story Method* of Reading, a recent development of the word method, initiated at the mission school, Moga. Working of the story method : (1) At the mission

girls' school, Chinsurah, and (2) at the mission school, Darnakal. Experiments to lessen relapse into illiteracy and to extend literacy to illiterate adults: Night schools and (2) travelling libraries. Working of the travelling library system in the Baroda State. Experiments at *education in illiteracy*: (1) Visual instruction in the Baroda State, (2) the oral method of instruction at Medak and (3) the oral and visual instruction organised by the Madras Y. M. C. A. pp. 41—55

CHAPTER VIII. The general problem of teacher-training.

How far teacher-training can help in the solution of the problems of primary education. Better methods of teaching cannot altogether remove the defects of a system in which the one-teacher schools predominate. There is also the defect due to the sex of the teacher. Ruralisation of the curriculum and the mode of its treatment, provision of hand-work and socialisation of the working of the school will require a new system of teacher-training, as initiated at the mission school, Moga (Chapter IX). Conditions of the supply of competent teachers. How far these conditions are satisfied by the existing arrangements in the different provinces. After-care. The Phillipine system of after-care. Measures adopted to this end by Missions in India pp. 56—67

CHAPTER IX. A new system of teacher-training: the Moga experiment.

Principles of teacher-training finding favour in the United States. The application of these principles in the training of rural teachers. The *Community Middle School* to supply the kind of general edu-

cation required of the new type of teachers. The project method of instruction underlying the treatment of the curriculum. Specialisation in the normal department. Practical training in community work included in the curriculum pp. 68—81

CHAPTER X. The provincial programmes of advance under the voluntary system.

Resolution of the Government of India of February, 1913, laid down the general policy. Supplementary instructions on teacher-training, issued in August, 1916. Definite provincial programmes suggested in the circular of September, 1918. Formulation of the provincial programmes of advance. The Panchayati Union Scheme in Bengal. The scheme formulated by Mr. E. E. Biss. The question of the respective liabilities of the provincial governments and local bodies, and the recommendations of the Central Advisory Board thereon. A decade's progress . . . pp. 82—106

CHAPTER XI. Administration of primary education.

Relation between the Local Government and the local bodies in the administration of primary education. Government of India's order of September, 1916. Effect of the Primary Education Acts of 1918-23. Board schools vs aided schools. Inauguration of new educational authorities in certain provinces pp. 107—115

CHAPTER XII. A note on the public education service in England.

School medical service. Protection of children. Meals for school children. Care-committees. Social and physical training of children pp. 116—121