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**Administrative Lessons from  
National Literacy Mission**  
Some Examples from Bihar

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Of all the spheres of Indian society where there is an enormous gap between the stated goals and actual achievements, literacy stands out as one of the most depressing features, probably next only to unemployment and poverty. In 2001, only two-thirds of the population in India was literate; and going by the present trend, the total literacy in India is approximately half-a-century away. Besides such low level and slow progress, the literacy scenario in India is also characterised by wide inequities, both social and geographical. Further, the widespread illiteracy in India is found not only among the aged, but also among younger boys and girls because of low enrolment and high dropout rates. One should also note that literacy is defined very liberally in the population census. Measured in terms of years of schooling, the average was merely 2.4 years for people aged 25 and above<sup>1</sup> during mid-nineties; at present it would be only marginally higher. The current literacy status in India as well as its rate of progress since the fifties would clearly indicate that the issue has generally been neglected. Among its South Asian neighbours, although the literacy rate in India is better than in Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh, it is much worse than in Sri Lanka. Compared to east and South-east Asian countries, the situation is again much worse in India, not only with respect to their current literacy rates, but even with respect to the past literacy rates of those countries when they were at a comparable state of economic development. Inadequate allocation of resources for the sector is also an indicator of neglect of literacy as an essential component of development. Although educational expenditure as a proportion of gross national product has increased from a little over 1 percent in early fifties to around 3 percent in early nineties, this is much below the target of 6 percent, recommended in 1966 by the Education Commission. Indeed, even this target of 6 percent is lower than the international average for the developing countries which stood at around 15 percent during the eighties<sup>2</sup>.

The latest census of 2001 had recorded the literacy rates in India at 65.4 percent. As mentioned before, this rate is much lower than what one would expect in India which has shown far higher achievements in many other economic and social spheres. However, it is not merely the low rates that characterise the poor state of education in the country. For one, the pace of progress in literacy rates, as revealed by decennial censuses, is very slow in India. Between 1961 and 2001, a span of forty years, literacy rate has gone up by a 37.1 percentage points, from 28.3 in 1961 to 65.4 in 2001. In other words, on an average, the literacy rate rises by approximately 9 percentage points in

a decade. This is abysmally low compared to the performance of many developing countries, all of which had started their planned development in the second half of this century.

The second distressing aspect of the literacy rates in India is the wide disparity among various social groups. For example, between the two genders, the rates differ by as much as 22 percentage points and this disparity has persisted all along. No less disturbing is the rural-urban disparity in literacy rates which again differ by even a wider margin. Here again, the disparity has persisted over the years. One could also mention here that scheduled castes and scheduled tribes form two other specially disadvantaged population groups in India and disparity in their case too is equally wide and persisting. As regards disparity among the various regions/states in India vis-à-vis their literacy rates, at the top of the hierarchy lies the state of Kerala with an exceptionally high literacy rate of 90.9 percent. This is basically because of strong social movements in this state even during the pre-independence period. For the second most literate state (Maharashtra), the literacy rate is much lower at 77.3 percent and, for Bihar (the least literate state) the rate is merely 47.5 percent. Thus, even after excluding Kerala, the difference between the second most literate state and the least literate state is as wide as 29.8 percentage points. It is also not always true that the literacy rates are higher only in economically rich states — for example, Kerala where the rate is the highest is a middle-income state and the literacy rate in poor-income state Assam is above the national average. This basically indicates the immense role of social factors, besides the economic ones, in promoting literacy.

## **II. PERSPECTIVE ON LITERACY**

A number of factors could be cited as the cause behind such utter neglect of education; but what possibly works at the root of these factors is the planners' perspective on literacy, i.e., why literacy and education is necessary or relevant. Broadly speaking, this perspective in the Indian context has been that literacy is essentially a welfare programme and, until the time when economic development has reached a sufficiently high state enabling the people to arrange and pay for their own literacy needs, the government has to shoulder this responsibility because of its social and welfare aspects. Obviously, within this narrow perspective, literacy received a much lower priority than was necessary to transform the sector whose earlier development was dictated by colonial policies. In the recent period, roughly since the early eighties, there has been some changes in this policy perspective. An appreciation of the potential contribution of education to the development

process, besides its welfare contributions, marked this change. In this perspective, education is recognised as a direct contributor to the development process since it is, along with health, a basic input for strengthening human resource which, in turn, could be an important source of development. Basically, this strategy maintains that it is possible for developing countries to change their comparative advantage from commodity and other low-skill labour intensive products to more skill-intensive goods and services through the deliberate expansion of human resource development. As a logical extension of this possibility, the strategy also emphasises the necessity of favouring human resource investment ‘beyond’ what would occur in the natural course of development<sup>3</sup>. According to Ahluwalia, the “quality of human resources, broadly defined to mean the educational attainment and skill level of the labour force, is another factor generally regarded as a critical determinant of growth. We should expect that states with superior availability of human skills and more rapid growth in these skills are more likely to have higher per capita GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) and to experience faster growth. However, since data on the educational and skill characteristics of the labour force are simply not available, the literacy rate of the population is commonly used by proxy for the quality of human resources”.<sup>4</sup> He further states that, “literacy in the slow-growing states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa is indeed very low”.<sup>5</sup> Criticality of education has thus transcended beyond welfare perspective to production perspective. ‘Knowledge’ input now is more important than ‘capital’.

We are already in the twenty-first century. This century is expected to usher ‘knowledge society’. Although in no period of the human history, ‘knowledge’ had attained such a pre-eminent position it had always been a critical input, whenever history had taken a decisive or dramatic leap. In fact, history of civilization is essentially a battle for banishment of ignorance and establishment of knowledge. In the process, a number of persons, whether philosophers or scientists, who had dared to blaze the knowledge trail uncompromisingly were either excommunicated or exterminated, like Charvak in our own country or Galileo in the Italy. Later, of course, they had emerged as an icon of upholder of knowledge even at the cost of their own life. Because of this incessant knowledge input, albeit of varying intensity in the different moments of history, the world has witnessed unprecedented technological and scientific development over the centuries. During this process, not only the span of different levels of development differed by several centuries, but it took years before it could be universal. When the ‘chopper’ was developed during the Stone Age, it remained only of its kind in the realm of invention for almost four

thousand years. Later developments have been much faster and, within the span of two hundred years since industrial revolution, thousands of inventions have transformed the world both technologically and socially. Now in the wake of ‘knowledge society’, thousands of inventions are again taking place day after day. It once appeared that production and organizational marvel ushered with the ‘assembly-line’ production of Ford in America in the early part of the twentieth century was the ultimate point of efficiency. But after unbridled sway of this production model for over a century, which brought about substantial change in productivity and accumulation, this form is likely to be redundant in the ‘knowledge century’. For any firm or economy which needs to survive productively, the ‘assembly-line’ production in the realm of industry is getting replaced by ‘flexi-line’ production model. In this model, unlike ‘assembly line’, each unit of production will be result of creativity on the basis of strong ‘knowledge’ foundation. Unlike earlier instances, the ‘knowledge’ input will now no longer be a sporadic or a ‘one shot’ affair, but it will be continuous and creative. Further, this ‘knowledge’ intensive growth strategy is not limited to industry only; it is now encompassing the entire productive and economic spectrum from agriculture to service, information and entertainment sector.<sup>6</sup>

For hundred years in the first phase, knowledge was applied to tools, processes and products. This created industrial revolution. But it also created what Marx called “alienation” which resulted into class divide. In its second phase, beginning around 1880 and culminating around World War II, knowledge in its new meaning came to be applied to work. This followed productivity revolution, which converted the western proletariats into middle class bourgeoisie with upper class income. The productivity revolution defeated class war and dismantled the edifice of East European Socialist countries. The last phase has begun in recent decades and now knowledge is being applied to knowledge itself. This process got further fillip through management revolution. The knowledge is now fast becoming yet another critical factor of production, marginalizing both capital and labour. It would be premature, if not presumptuous, to call the western countries a ‘knowledge society’, but certainly they are on the threshold of a ‘knowledge economy’. It is essentially a ‘post capitalist’ phenomenon, demanding radically different societal responses.<sup>7</sup>

### **Emerging Trend of Knowledge Economy**

In the western countries, specially in USA, there has been a marked shift from goods-based production to high skill, high technology, service based growth. Low skill, blue collar positions

have been disappearing at an alarming rate in developed economies, as labour-based production has been shifted to lower cost areas throughout the world. An increasing percentage of the GNP of developed economies is now derived from high skill services. Knowledge in the form of complex problem solving, technological innovation, creative exploitation of new markets, and the development of new product or service is central to success in these areas. The Statistics of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an economic organisation of developed countries, reflect this transition. Since 1960's, service prices have increased more than three times as rapidly as industrial prices, and percentage of US GNP arising from services has risen from just 50 to 80 percent. Of these services, 63 percent are considered to be in high skill categories. According to World Bank, 64 percent of the world's wealth now consists of 'human capital', and a study by Mckinsey had prognosticated that, by the beginning of this century, more than 80 percent of all jobs in USA will be 'cerebral' in nature.<sup>8</sup> In the new knowledge-based economy, enterprise through duplication of commodities at ever increasing level with low skill, low wage employees can no longer ensure growth. Enterprise today demands innovation and innovation depends on knowledge.<sup>9</sup> These strategic changes at industrial and business transaction will have profound changes on our way of life at both organizational and social levels. With an ever increasing proportion of advanced economies being devoted to knowledge-based services, a new economic theory is beginning to emerge, which suggests that ability to innovate and exploit market has replaced production efficiency (and therefore the concept of cost reduction productivity) as the major driver of growth in the international economy. Similarly, there are indications that domestic growth arises not through expansion of market share (particularly in the near saturation domestic market for developed economies), but through the introduction of entirely new technologies or problem solving services that create new markets. Increasingly, the knowledge skill needed to create these technologies and services, whether on an individual, organizational or national level may be the key to economic growth and prosperity.<sup>10</sup>

To ensure development in the wake of retreat of the state, the investment in educational sector becomes extremely important. Some of the recent policy trends in India are probably indicative of such efforts in human resource investment. First, the expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP had continued to increase — from 2.54 for the triennium around 1979-80 to 3.26 for the triennium around 1989-90, although the percentage of expenditure on many other components of social and community services has remained nearly stagnant. Secondly, there was an increase in

the share of primary education in the total educational expenditure<sup>11</sup>, enabling the government to launch literacy programmes outside the formal system. And finally, there were a number of policy exercises to restructure the education system in accordance with the new perspective on education. However, as a result of the structural adjustment programme of the government since the beginning of nineties, the resource commitment for education (in terms of expenditure as percentage of GDP) has started declining, but other dimensions of the change are probably still visible.

### **III. STRATEGY OF NATIONAL LITERACY MISSION**

Until the early 1980s, India's macro-economic policies were conservative. After that, fiscal prudence was abandoned, with the consequence that current revenue surpluses turned into deficits. This meant that the government had to borrow at home and abroad to finance not only its investments, as would normally be the case in a developing country, but also its current consumption. However, this fiscal expansionism of 1980's was unsustainable. By 1990-91 the gross fiscal deficit of the central and state government had grown to 9 percent of GDP at market prices. If one includes the losses of the non-financial public-sector enterprises and the oil pool balance, the consolidated public-sector deficit stood at 10.9 percent of GDP in 1990-91. Nearly two-fifths of this deficit, or 4.3 percent of GDP, was for interest payments on domestic and external debt.<sup>12</sup>

In the backdrop of near fiscal insolvency, it was not possible for the state to be in the classical role of a 'provider'. On the other hand, to 'enable' the society, literacy 'endowment' is a necessary precondition. The earlier model of 'centre based' adult literacy was not only costly its reach was also limited. If state had to get back its legitimacy and hegemony it had to innovate in the delivery mechanism. Unlike the 'Garibi Hatao' (Banish Poverty) programme in late sixties, the government sponsored programme had lost appeal and authenticity. The 1980's also witnessed an unprecedented ethno-religious mobilisation. The Congress Party wanted to steal the thunder of ethno-religious mobilisation, by promoting alternative brand of mobilisation by storming the Golden Temple to flush out the Sikh terrorists. This act was considered to be triumph of India over centrifugal tendencies. Congress swept the poll in Jammu and high profile Delhi University student union election. Religious agenda started playing central in electoral battles. With the assassination of Indira Gandhi, soft religion was in full play, and Rajeev Gandhi swept the poll in



an unprecedented manner. However, the Indian state understood the limits of ethno-religious mobilisation, and thus wanted to introduce an alternative model of mobilisation by launching the class neutral programme of banishment of literacy by campaign model. However, the nuts and bolts of the campaign model were inspired by leftist model in Kerala. Apart from campaign model, an innovation in the realm of organisational structure and financial devolution was also attempted. A autonomous organisation, called Zila Saksharta Samiti (ZSS) was created at the district level, whose ownership was to be shared authentically by the Government and the civil society. Secondly, these organizations were further strengthened by the direct devolution of funds from the centre without the fetters and the scrutiny of the State Government. This administrative model followed the political trajectory of mother and son duo of Indira and Rajeev Gandhi. When Indira Gandhi was ousted from the Congress Party by the so called 'Syndicate', she responded to this ouster by bypassing the regional satrap and going over to the masses. In the absence of innovative ideas as a 'provider' and to arrest the popular decline of Congress Party, Rajeev Gandhi continued its mass contact over the heads of the regional power centres. The Government of India's strategy in the realm of NLM had imprint of Rajeev Gandhi's political personality in this respect. In the context of Campaign Model of literacy, one of the major initiatives of the government towards promotion of literacy has been the establishment of the National Literacy Mission to strengthen the adult literacy efforts in the country. The Mission which was set up in 1988 took over the National Adult Education Programme as it was conceptualised in 1978. The National Adult Education Programme followed the centre-based approach under the Rural Functional Literacy Projects.

The NLM was initially conceived as a societal mission implying political will at all levels for the achievement of its goals in a time-bound manner. It was set up with the objective of making 80 million persons functionally literate by the year 1995. One of the first task of NLM was, therefore, to review all the ongoing programmes at that time. Between 1978 and 1985, the programme was evaluated by a number of professional evaluating agencies and they all had repeatedly pointed out the ills of the earlier programmes, the major ones being that:

- (i) the community was not involved in the programme and the entire implementation mechanism was centralised, hierarchical and bureaucratic;
- (ii) adequate political and administrative support of the State governments and Panchayati Raj Institutions were not forthcoming;

- (iii) learners' motivation and, therefore, their participation was low with considerable dropouts and relapse into illiteracy;
- (iv) quality of training was poor; and
- (v) there was absence of post-literacy and continuing education programmes.

In spite of these deficiencies being pointed out repeatedly in successive evaluation studies, there was lack of adequate effort to address these problems. What the NLM tried to do between 1988 and 1990 was to consolidate the earlier centre-based programmes to make its implementation more effective. The NLM had also prepared detailed guidelines for this programme and made several changes in its administrative procedures. But the situation did not improve, because there was no concept of involvement of the community or creating an environment for literacy and generation of its demand. The mode of implementation was through a bureaucratic process and structure. The teaching-learning period was excessively long, leading to substantial dropouts. Another aspect was the mushroom growth of voluntary agencies from 1978 onwards, many of them unscrupulous and the government's inability to differentiate the good from the bad.

### **Origin of the Campaign Approach**

It was, therefore, not surprising that even subsequent evaluation studies between 1988 and 1990, also pointed out persistence of the earlier weaknesses of the adult education programmes. One notable exception to the centre-based approach was an experiment with the 'campaign mode' of adult education programme in Kottayam city in Kerala which was an exemplary success.<sup>13</sup> But the real breakthrough came after a similar experiment in mass literacy campaign at a wider scale was successfully completed in 1990 in Ernakulam district in Kerala. The campaign for total literacy in Ernakulam saw a fusion between the district administration headed by its Collector at one hand and voluntary groups, social activists and others at the other. It was spearheaded by the Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP).<sup>14</sup> Ernakulam achieved this objective on 4th February, 1990 and along with it the unique distinction of being the first district in the county to become 'totally literate'. The success led to the launching of a statewide campaign in Kerala, a campaign more challenging in size and complexity. The Kerala State Literacy Campaign covered 18 lakh persons in the age group of 6-60 years within a span of one year. The social and administrative mechanism that led to the success of the campaign included several measures:

- (a) Well laid organisational synergy of governmental and community outfits in which both tended to transfer and share initiative and responsibility. Accordingly, a broad based registered body called Ernakulam District Literacy Society (EDLS) with the Collector as the Convenor and Joint Coordinator spearheaded the programme at the apex level, and the voluntary organisations and local bodies at different layers down to the village level, facilitated the implementation process.
- (b) In order to assess the clientele thoroughly, multi-stage and door-to-door surveys were conducted, followed by mass contact programmes to ensure active participation.
- (c) Kala Jathas (cultural troupes) and Saksharata Pad Yatras (literacy foot march) were organised in order to attune the social context to the goals of the programme.
- (d) Participatory management system was followed where the responsibilities and functions of different layers overlapped and crossed the boundaries of power which sought to bridge the distance between the bottom of the social and administrative strata and the policy makers at the apex level.
- (e) Life-related and development and welfare linked teaching learning process in which the KSSP and the State Resource Centre, Kerala jointly worked on the preparation of relevant teaching learning materials and carefully selected and trained instructors and volunteers.

The principal shift in strategy was, therefore, a change from a scattered and piecemeal strategy to a well coordinated, comprehensive and identifiable initiative. It also marked a change by altering the social context in order to generate demand for the programme and further to sustain it. The Ernakulam experiment proved to be a breakthrough and established the feasibility of a community-based, campaign approach with the objective of generating environment building and demand for literacy followed by literacy instructions. Subsequently, sanctioned campaigns have all attempted to replicate, by and large, the strategy and the various phases and processes in the Ernakulam campaign. The experience gained from Ernakulam is valuable inputs for designing effective training strategies, organisation of teaching-learning activities, management and supervision etc. Thus, not out of any wisdom internal to the NLM, but based on Ernakulam experience, NLM had formulated a set of guidelines for literacy campaigns, as different from literacy programme of earlier years. These guidelines, however, are not viewed as prescriptive or

sacrosanct but as suggested principles to enable literacy functionaries to think through the objectives and strategies of the literacy campaign to help it attain its goals.

### **Literacy Campaign in Hindi Heartland <sup>15</sup>**

India is too large a country to be a homogeneous one with respect to either physical or economic or social characteristics. That the country is still a single political unit is indeed creditworthy, but this also sometimes misleads people to be oblivious of the wide social divergences within the country. The seven states of the country (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand) form one such region, where both social and economic progress has been the least. Surprisingly, the linguistic base of all these seven states is Hindi <sup>16</sup> which is the national language of India. For any major improvement in the literacy rates in India, the earlier literacy programmes needed to be most successful here; but unfortunately, the actual performance there has left much to be desired. Each State in India has multiple identities. Language is probably the most dominant or visible dimension of that identity, but there are others too. Language wise, Bihar is generally seen as part of that vast social mass called Hindi Heartland which also characterises its dominant social structure. But if one were to search for an economic identity of Bihar, its Hindi Heartland label is far from appropriate and its Eastern Indian identity would probably be more relevant there. Further, if one were to again characterise Bihar's political process, then it is obvious that the presence of a large tribal population in southern part of the State, now a separate state of Jharkhand lends its political process a feature, not at all common in either Hindi Heartland or Eastern India. Such multiple identities, as mentioned before, are present in many of the States in India; but in case of Bihar, there is an additional dimension. Within Hindi Heartland, Bihar's social development is probably the lowest; within Eastern India, Bihar is the poorest economically; and finally, within the tribal region of central India, the tribal politics had already acquired a clearly independent identity only in the state. Where else in India one could find a State with so much burden of history?

If one were to discuss the implications of such burden of history on the development process, then the literacy programme would stand out as one of the most difficult task. This is because promotion of literacy is not an activity where certain given amount of financial resources can be utilised, through a known method of technology, to produce a desired output. For example, agriculture needs irrigation. A simple remedy for this is to make investment in irrigation sector for

canals, tubewells and the like. Notwithstanding the feudal structure of our rural society which would probably influence the cost and operational efficiency of the irrigation projects, the activity will be basically economic in nature where things like a campaign or motivational programme or mobilisation process of the people will not be a critical factor. This is not the case with the literacy development. There, the resources, however adequate, might fail to generate even a minimum impact if social inputs for the programme are missing. Since literacy programmes in the ground level are essentially social programmes, this framework must incorporate the social specificities of the region. The seven major Hindi-speaking States together form a very large part of the country, accounting for no less than 40 percent of its total population, and it is thus bound to display certain variation in social structure across its boundaries. But this does not obliterate the uniformity of certain basic social characteristics of the region, which seem to arise from some social and political trend of events during the colonial period, and many of these characteristics have strong implications for development programmes in the region in general and literacy programme in particular.

### **Hindi Heartland as an Incentive-free Social Region**

The concept of a social region rests not only on the certain common social practices that its inhabitants may share, but on the acquisition of a regional identity as well. Since India as a country is too large, inhabited by people of various religion and languages in diverse geographical areas, the emergence of national identity here has often been accompanied by a simultaneous emergence of regional identity. The process of emergence of nationalism in India had started during the British period, basically as a reaction to the colonial presence. But, because of the socio-cultural diversity of its people, nationalism has been developing here at two levels — one at all-India, on the basis of pan-Indian cultural homogeneity and anti-imperialism shared in common; and another regional, generally around a linguistic identity which also implied relatively smaller geographical areas (like Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu etc.).<sup>17</sup> In the Hindi Region, the process of capitalist transformation and concomitant edifice of incentive structure got stunted. Thus in the Hindi-speaking areas, emergence of sub-nationalism had been a much weaker process for various reasons.<sup>18</sup> To begin with, the first major resistance to the colonial rule was made at this region (during the First War of Independence in 1857) and, ever since then, the British exploitation has been most severe here. As a result, while regions like Bengal and Maharashtra have taken to English-education and certain social reforms much earlier, people in Hindi heartland have

persistently resisted such attempts, viewing them as colonial strategies to destroy their own culture and tradition. Consequently, the region had failed to give rise to a middle class (comprising the small industrialists, traders, landlords and petty bourgeoisie) who in most other parts of the country had spearheaded the social reforms and the incentive consciousness. The emergence of a sub-national identity was further obstructed in the Hindi-speaking region by the fact that Hindi, as a language, was far from standardised — between Bihar in the east and Rajasthan on the west, linguists have identified at least one dozen variants of the language, each one spoken by at least 20 million people. Consequently, the possibility of linguistic identity which could lay the seeds for a regional social identity later was also not there. In the context of literacy programmes, this two related phenomena — the absence of strong regional identity and a middle class which has spearheaded the social movements in most other parts of the country — meant that much of the Hindi Heartland is still under a value system which does not accord adequate recognition to education as a critical individual endowment. Thus literacy is a far less ‘felt’ need of the illiterate here. In many other parts of India, this element of modernisation (which made people conscious that education is a universal necessity and not to be confined to a small elite only) was the outcome of social movements that had taken place in late nineteenth or early twentieth century and these areas have responded more positively to the development programmes that were started in the post-independence era, including the literacy programmes. A major change in NLM’s focus of attention had, therefore, taken place in 1993 when it had shifted from high literacy districts to the low literacy ones of the northern belt of Hindi speaking States. This has been in recognition of the widening gap in the development process between these States and the remaining ones which meant that the ultimate success of the NLM depends more on its achievements in these States than elsewhere.

In a general sense, the pedagogic problems of adult education are no different in Hindi-speaking area and elsewhere. But one of the common problems of adult literacy is that adult learners would generally expect immediate and substantial benefits accruing to them once they become literate. The extent, to which such expectations are fulfilled, however, depends not on the literacy programme itself but on the social, and more importantly, the economic environment in which the learners live. The seven Hindi-speaking States, as is well known, are not only socially but even economically backward and the neo-literates here thus find much less opportunity to utilise their newly acquired skills to bring them some material benefit. Understandably, the NLM is aware of

this particular problem of literacy programmes and has advised the Zilla Saksharata Samities to forge adequate links between literacy and various government-sponsored income generating activities. But establishment of such links has rarely been attempted and the absence of such links has affected the literacy programmes in economically poor Hindi-speaking States far more than elsewhere.

The above problems of literacy movements in the Hindi-speaking States are generally external in character. The lowness of existing literacy rates, the absence of a value system which accords education a place of pride or the basically stagnant nature of the economy are all beyond the purview of change in near future, even less so by the NLM. But there are certain other obstacles that are internal to the functioning of NLM. Consider, for example, the fact that the existing literacy rates in most of the Hindi-speaking region is very low. This has two important implications for the literacy programmes — first, the number of illiterates is much larger and second, the number of literates who are prospective VT's (Voluntary Teachers) is much smaller. If we note that in low-literacy areas, the gender-disparity in literacy is higher (i.e., a very large part of the illiterate is all women), then this problem of finding adequate VT's to run the literacy campaign becomes even more serious. Quite often, this results in insufficiently educated persons being put in charge of learning centres, causing low literacy achievements. The nature of NGOs, executing the literacy programmes, is another such factor. Two of the States in India where literacy programmes had shown good progress are Kerala and West Bengal. In both these States, ZSSs function in a fairly autonomous manner — in Kerala because of KSSP and in West Bengal because of Panchayats. In many other parts of India also, the successful TLCs have generally been found to be executed by NGO's which, besides being formally non-government, are also a NGO proper in the sense that they enjoy an element of enlightened voluntarism and have the requisite organisational strength to act as autonomous units. In contrast, voluntary work is far less visible in the Hindi heartland states and such NGOs which are organisationally strong and professionally competent to support the literacy campaigns are not easy to find here. The role of the government machinery has therefore been much larger here for mobilisation of literacy functionaries (like VT's) and other dimensions of the campaign. But even under such social constraints, NLM has not deviated from its principled strategy of organising the literacy campaigns through Zilla Saksharata Samities (ZSS), at least formally a non-government organisation. In all the districts, therefore, the ZSS includes not only the district Collector (as its Chairperson) and some government officials,

but many non-officials as well — representatives of Panchayat Raj Institutions, women activists, educationists, teachers from schools/colleges and other leading members of the community. In Bihar also, earlier literacy movements started way back in 1938-39 had acquired the character of mass movement because it was integrated with the national movement. This fabrication of national movement and literacy was undertaken by Dr. Syed Mahmud, the then Education Minister of Bihar. The usual pattern in most of the Hindi-speaking areas is the ZSS's which are very often 'created' by the district level administration and, consequently, are too dependent on the Collector's office to display adequate commitment or innovation. For many of these ZSS's, the literacy programmes are probably their first effort in grass-root level development activity and the inexperience always shows in their performance.

### **Achievements of Adult Literacy Campaigns**

The approach of the NLM towards promoting adult literacy marks certain basic improvements, in particular its emphasis on and creating space for community participation in literacy campaigns. Yet another dimension of this improved strategy is a series of monitoring / evaluation exercises that each district-based literacy campaigns is subjected to. The evaluation process starts with the pre-appraisal of the TLC (Total Literacy Campaign) proposal and thereafter there are three evaluations — concurrent, internal and external. The final evaluation of the TLC is conducted by an agency, external to the ZSS and generally from outside the state, and is thus referred to as 'external' evaluation. The methodology for such external evaluation is based on the recommendations of an Expert Committee (Arun Ghosh Committee) set up by NLM. Later another Expert Committee had further concretised those recommendations and the district-based external evaluations studies, more about 300 conducted till date, provide a comparable information base for knowing the achievements of NLM, both at micro and macro-level. Apart from much other valuable information, each study estimates a literacy 'achievement rate' for the district, defined as the 'percentage of adult illiterates who became literates through literacy campaign out of those identified by a door-to-door survey'.

The independence of the evaluation agencies and the soundness of the adopted methodology together have ensured the credibility of the estimated achievement rates. As expected, it has shown wide variation — from as low as 20 percent to as high as 90 percent. If the evaluated districts are classified into three levels with respect to their achievement rates — poor (less than 40 percent),



average (between 40-60 percent) and good (above 60 percent), then at least one-fourth of the evaluated districts will be found to be good, another one-fourth as poor and the remaining half as average. The overall achievement rate (average for all the evaluated districts) will probably be between 45-50 percent. Considering the immense social challenges that a literacy campaign faces, this is certainly not a low achievement. Further, a noteworthy feature of literacy campaign is that, whenever the campaign has been even moderately successful, it has been so for its reach among the illiterate women. Thus higher levels of achievement rates have invariably meant narrower gender-disparity in literacy.

A second indicator of appreciable contribution of NLM towards promoting adult literacy is the decadal increase in literacy rates, from 52.2 in 1991 to 65.4 percent in 2001. Admittedly, this is an indirect indicator as the census literacy rates cover all age-groups. More meaningful estimates of the contribution of adult literacy campaign can be made only after census publishes the age-specific literacy rates; but an increase of 13.2 percentage points in literacy rates is not possible without substantial progress in adult literacy. The 2001 census also shows that the decadal increase in literacy rates have been higher than the national average in three of the four major states in Hindi heartland — Uttar Pradesh (by 16.7 percentage points), Madhya Pradesh (by 19.4 percentage points) and Rajasthan (22.4 percentage points). Only Bihar with a decadal increase of 10.1 percentage points still lags behind.

The adult literacy campaign of NLM, based as they are on extensive community participation, is largely a social process. Successful campaigns, therefore, produce not only a large number of neo-literates, but it often unleashes a social force which extends the agenda of literacy to other community goals. These achievements of the literacy campaign are not measurable, but many among the large number of literacy functionaries (specially Voluntary Teachers) have often transformed themselves to become effective social activists later. In a sense, these literacy functionaries are like 'barefoot managers' who could utilise their managerial skill in a variety of ways. It has been found in several districts that following the success of adult literacy campaigns, there has emerged other success stories, sometime in the field of micro-credit groups, or functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, or strengthening of the primary schooling system through higher enrolment and community participation, and the like.

The achievements of the NLM would appear to be even more substantial, if we remember that the per learner cost of imparting literacy under the NLM strategy has been about Rs. 100 or even lower. Even if we take into account the overhead costs or that the overall literacy achievement rate is about 50 percent (implying that costs incurred on the remaining 50 percent go waste), the ‘effective’ per learner cost for adult literacy will be about Rs. 250-300. It is difficult to think of any other development programme where such a small sum brings such an important benefit like literacy to an individual.<sup>19</sup>

#### **IV. ADMINISTRATIVE LESSONS FOR NLM**

India was one of the earliest countries to be freed from the colonial rule just after the World War II and then adopt a development strategy where the role of the state was so large that it was widely referred as a state-led strategy of development. Obviously the approach demanded not merely resource support from the state, but creation of a new institution in the form of development administration to supplement the existing civil administrative machinery. Although the two administrations — civil and development — were never organisationally separated, the idea that the two tasks required varying approaches was generally understood. However, whereas for civil administration, the bureaucracy had a long experience to bank upon, the challenge of development administration had to be faced without such experience and much of development administration was based more on theory and intuition. With experience accumulating, the thrust and strategy of development programmes have later changed and it has sometimes even shown improvements in limited areas or sectors. But in the face of wide gap between resources expended and benefits obtained, enquiries about the limitations of the development administration in India became a major part of debate on development, particularly its institutional dimensions. By the end of seventies, the scenario of state-led development was so very strained that limitations of the development administration was no longer an issue of challenge, it was more in the nature of an impending crisis.

As expected, this crisis of development administration was not an isolated phenomenon. Among others, it was closely related to yet another crisis of the government which started from early eighties in the form of deteriorating public finances, particularly the huge fiscal deficits year after year. With resources squeezed, the development administration in India had no option but to abandon its earlier role of a ‘provider’ and search for an alternative role which is both relevant and

feasible. Without this transition, the administration would have lost its legitimacy and so would have the government, since decades of state-led development, notwithstanding its serious limitations, has deeply engraved in the minds of the people the image of both administration and the government as a 'provider'. If the development administration did not succeed when the resources were adequate, the imperative of redefining its role in the face of lessened resources could not but be a kind of crisis. The new perspective on development where market was the key institution to decide the allocation of resources had not probably emerged that strongly in early eighties, but by the end of eighties, it had become far more accepted, making the crisis of administration even deeper. Indeed, the crisis was so deep that a proper response to it had to originate at a higher level, viz., the political system. The legislative interventions to promote decentralisation through Panchayati Raj Institutions were the main step in that direction. A second important response to this crisis had started from the realisation that to treat government as the sole agency responsible for development programmes is a flawed notion. It not only assumes the government to be too ideal an organisation, but also ignores that community participation has been of profound significance to the success of many development efforts. Decentralisation and community participation was thus identified as the two new dimensions of development administration, changing its character from a 'providing' to an 'enabling' institution and in the process legitimising both the government and the administration.

Although conscious effort to promote community participation in development programmes is a relatively recent phenomenon, it has a much longer history as a concept, dating back to the late fifties. The social activists who had joined the movement for an accelerated development in the early fifties had to soon stumble against a reality that was much different from the one assumed by the development theorists. Looking for the cause of failed development efforts, they noted that the people concerned was almost invariably kept out of the development projects vis-à-vis their formulation and implementation. It was as if people neither knew nor wanted development, so development had to be 'imparted' to them. The experience of the development administration in India about their own top-down strategy was no less different, but a change in the perspective probably had to wait till such negative experiences have been aggregated at the global level to create a strong force for change. From roughly the mid-eighties, this approach was adopted in several development programmes and the campaign mode strategy of the National Literacy Mission is yet another step in the same direction.

## **Macro-level Lessons of NLM**

The literacy campaigns that are funded and supported by the NLM, as mentioned before, are evaluated district-wise and by now a large database has already been created, indicating not only the quantitative achievements of the campaign in different districts, but underlining some of their administrative and organizational lessons. Some of these administrative lessons are so very common among the different districts that they could easily be clubbed as macro-level ones. But just as the districts differ vis-à-vis their social and cultural background as well as their development status, the literacy campaigns have often incorporated modifications that responded to the specific threats and opportunities in the district. It would certainly be meaningful to analyse how these modifications were planned by the literacy functionaries of the respective districts and draw some further lessons which, in view of their area specificity, would be called micro-lessons. We have done that exercise in the next section.

Even in a situation where the development administration is convinced that a particular programme cannot succeed without it, the community participation may not be forthcoming merely through an invitation. Any such participation demands both an ambience and an institutional arrangement. The working of the NLM has shown that creating such an ambience and promoting an institution that facilitate community participation in the Indian context is not only a feasibility, but quite often much easier than executing the programme in the old top-down approach. The first three out of the following four macro-lessons are all around this basic issue of how to promote community participation for a development programme.

(1) Composition of Zilla Saksharata Samity (ZSS): An obvious constraint to community participation in development programme is the absence of an institution through which participation would be actualized. For such institutions to be effective they should first have a specific agenda and secondly, they should be socially very inclusive. The first condition of a specific agenda actually provides a rationale for the institution and the institution stands as long as the agenda remains incomplete. Inclusiveness, on the other hand, is meant to ensure the effectiveness of the institution. In any society and more so in a typical Indian one, a new institution, left to itself, is likely to be dominated or even monopolized by those who are already in the command of existing institutions. An institution meant to facilitate community participation cannot obviously be effective if such domination or exclusiveness is allowed. By bringing into

play the administrative authority, if the institution can be made more inclusive, incorporating members from all sections of the society (particularly the marginalized ones), it obviously signals an invitation for people's participation.

Learning from the experiences of Kerala, the NLM has thus insisted that the pivotal institution for literacy campaign will be the Zilla Saksharata Samities (ZSS), not the concerned government department. To lend further support to ZSS, the NLM also makes it mandatory for all ZSS to become 'formal' institutions through registration. While the condition of a specific agenda is automatically fulfilled by the ZSS, the successful districts have made sustained efforts to ensure that the composition of ZSS reflects social inclusiveness, as wide as necessary. The concept of a ZSS at the district headquarters, supported by a number of Block-level Saksharata Samities (BSS) and finally numerous Village Saksharata Samities (VSS) are also a part of making the ZSS geographically most inclusive.

(2) Social Mobilisation: In comparison to the task of creating a suitable institution for community participation, the task of mobilizing a community for a development programme is far more challenging. Essentially, it demands a regular communication process between the ZSS and the people at large. It is not difficult to cite instances where such a communication process has indeed functioned to support a social agenda, but they have generally been between political parties and the people. Since the literacy campaign may not initially have as strong an appeal as most political issues have, the NLM had to innovate an alternative mobilization strategy to promote community participation in its campaign. The generic term for the group of activities to mobilize the people for literacy campaign is 'environment building', whose immediate objectives are to make all the people aware about the need of literacy and the objectives/strategy of literacy campaign. Most thoughtfully, NLM's guidelines for such awareness campaign strongly emphasize the use of local, traditional and folk modes of communication. The use of such modes of communication enhances the acceptability of the message, but more than that, it enlivens the cultural base of the communities and the resulting heightened social and cultural activism gradually mobilizes the community towards the agenda of literacy. In the TLC (Total Literacy Campaign) and PL (Post Literacy) Campaign the social mobilisation was relatively easy because it entailed involving people from the margin of the society. But in CE (Continuing Education) stage

the society as a whole would be involved, irrespective of class and social hierarchy. At that stage it will be a really challenging task of social mobilisation.

Prior to NLM's attempts for social mobilization through the environment building activities of ZSS, one could possibly cite examples where the administration has promoted cultural activities, but they have neither been regular nor wide enough to reach the majority of the villages. The NLM's experience, therefore, strongly suggests that, even with moderate financial and logistic support from the administration or the ZSS, the community can mobilize itself, provided the methods employed are innovative enough.

In the NLM's strategy of the literacy campaigns, community participation has indeed been the key element. Thus, how a institution like ZSS could be built to serve a social agenda like adult literacy, or how even a formal organisation like district administration, in association with ZSS, could undertake an unstructured exercise of social mobilization or how ZSS could be allowed certain organizational freedom, are the most valuable lessons that one could draw from NLM's experience of the last one decade. But these apart, the strategy of literacy campaigns of the NLM have at least two other important dimensions, whose contribution towards the overall achievements of the Mission are no less. These two dimensions, as would become apparent from the discussion below, are taken care of at the level of NLM and, as such, external to ZSS.

(3) Organisational, Pedagogic and Logistic Planning: Most development programmes are defined in terms of an objective and the financial resources. It is generally taken for granted that the existing government administration at the relevant level is organizationally mature and flexible enough to execute the programme, once the resources have been provided. This certainly cannot be invariably true and successful implementation of any programme demands that it is backed by a planning exercise where each step of the programme is specifically identified, sequencing of the steps are done properly, responsibilities are distributed among the available personnel, and it is also ensured that the executing personnel receive adequate logistic support at each point to accomplish their task. Such an exercise actually demands a kind of advance visualization of the programme implementation at the grass-root level which is not possible without some substantive work experience of a similar programme. The planning exercise at the NLM during early nineties was indeed backed by such an experience drawn from Kerala and its guidelines to the ZSS

therefore present adequate details about the various organizational, pedagogic and logistic dimensions of literacy campaigns.

(4) Monitoring and Evaluation: This is yet another noteworthy dimension of the literacy campaigns of NLM, without which the present achievements of the campaigns would not have been possible. The monitoring of the campaign is generally undertaken by the agencies internal to the campaign — village-level teaching-learning being mentioned by the ZSS; the state administration monitoring the ZSS; and the NLM finally monitoring the state-level administration. But the real strength of the strategy lies in the external evaluations that each district-based literacy campaign is subjected to. The evaluation of other development programmes, if any, are generally done at the aggregate level and, quite often, with a large time-lag between the execution and evaluation of the programme. The evaluation reports, even when alarmingly negative, often remain as official documents, sometimes even concerned executing agency being unaware of them. In contrast, the external evaluation of literacy campaigns is done immediately often the ZSS itself claims the campaigns to have crossed its first stage. These evaluations, even when negative, may not entail any punishment and the rewards, if any, are only indirect, like extension and more resources for the campaign. But that the ZSS is obviously made accountable for the failure of the campaign which makes it more mindful of its objectives and efforts.

### **Micro-level Lessons of NLM**

With its heavy leaning on community participation, the adult literacy campaigns in India are as much a social process as a pedagogic one. It should, therefore, surprise none that the literacy campaigns across the country, along with their obvious commonalities, have also displayed sufficient variations. These variations are essentially the reflection of wide differences among the districts vis-à-vis their social, economic, political and cultural characteristics. Far from being a source of discomfort, this variations are useful feedbacks for the NLM to know the strength of their campaign strategies. The two basic content of these variations are first around the method of mass mobilization, and secondly, around the ‘social’ consequences of mass literacy. As mentioned, these variations can be analysed only in the specific context of the respective districts and hence they may be called micro-administrative lessons of NLM. Quite expectedly, most of these administrative innovations were introduced in backward districts, whose ‘social distance’ from Ernakulam is very large. As an illustration, one can discuss three districts of Bihar and one

district in Jharkhand, in two of which the campaign had attained noteworthy success (Begusarai and Dumka) and in other two moderate successes (Buxar and West Champaran).

Organising an adult literacy campaign, as mentioned before, are far more challenging in the Hindi heartland states. In the specific context of Bihar, this is not merely because of the social backwardness of the region alone; certain social trends of the recent past have added additional constraints for the development administration in the state which was less than effective even earlier. The most serious victim of this deterioration was the state apparatus itself, the very institution that is universally mandated to prevent social deteriorations caused by failure of other social institutions. The incapacitation of the state in Bihar is so severe that it is now probably unable to perform its minimal function of civil administration, its developmental role becoming a distant cry. It should be borne in mind that the state in Bihar was always limited.<sup>20</sup> Even during the British period, the reach of the state was limited. It was no accident that the Permanent Settlement was introduced by Lord Cornwallis in 1793, not only for better tax administration but essentially to create intermediaries, who will act as a administrative buffer between the turbulent social terrain and the state. Consider the fact that the state is now able to finance less than two-thirds of its total expenditure with its own resources and for the remaining part of the expenditure, it has to borrow. The state government is already in a debt trap where it has to borrow fresh every year, just to debt service its earlier borrowings. Obviously, the share of development expenditure in the total is diminishing fast. This weakening of the state is accompanied by a small and stagnant market, the other institution which is now projected as the alternative to the state apparatus. Finally, as regards the civil society, its presence has certainly been large in Bihar, but it has not been able to disassociate itself from the political agenda of the state and thus unable to accept the responsibility of social developments. One could not expect the literacy campaigns to show spectacular results under such socio-political constraints, but the NLM's strategy had left some room for success even under such circumstances.

While administrative stagnation and economic hold up marked the Bihar firmament, the society and the polity in Bihar has always been vibrant and in fact in tremor, unlike in other Hindi Heartland states. It can be said figuratively that 'million mutinies' are taking place in Bihar. These mutinies literally ranged from micro to mega struggles. And this phenomenon had historical antecedent. Apart from the stellar role of Bihar in the independent struggle, there have been



several movements which had strong impact on the local politics and society. Unfortunately, some of the, mega class struggle like that of Kisan Sabha against the intermediaries (Zamindars) or social stirring by the Triveni Sangh (involving the Koeri, Kurmi and Yadav caste) could not expand their social network or agenda beyond their immediate goal. In the absence of composite economic or sub-national agenda, the elite and the opinion makers could not develop stake for the state and the concomitant incentive structure could not be internalised in the social structure. In this backdrop it was better to examine the lessons of the National Literacy Mission than any other programme of Government of India. In this programme not only the state Government has space for participation, but this is one of the most inclusive programme for the civil society. Amongst all other programme of Government of India, the agenda of literacy should have been natural choice for Bihar Government. Not being in the forefront of economic resurgence or towards the path of a state sector reform, the literacy was one of the agenda with which the ruling social group in Bihar could relate. The social composition of the ruling elite is unique in Bihar. It is not to be found anywhere in the country. If the traditional elites shaped the national movement and guided the post independent development of India, the vernacular elite or the agro-capitalists forced the Indian polity to take cognizance of the Green Revolution. Cockney Elite, on the other hand, are not a homogeneous class group; they are either on the fringe of the market or totally outside. But their preeminence stemmed from electoral empowerment. It was expected that, for this group, literacy is a natural agenda. With literacy, they could get socially consolidated. When in 1995, the present regime in Bihar defied the incumbency factor in the state election; the agenda of literacy appeared to be one of the main agenda. But after the unveiling of the fodder scam, the agenda of literacy got relegated. However, this agenda was allowed to be pursued whenever any individual civil servants displayed commitment. At least the governing elite were not hostile to any particular district specific initiative.

### **Economic Regions of Bihar Plains**

The districts of Bihar are economically and socially heterogeneous. Some of the variation is due to marked difference between the Gangetic plain and the ecologically distinct Jharkhand plateau, part of which have large tribal population. Before we discuss the literacy experience in the three districts of Bihar plain, let us briefly deal with the nature of agrarian economy in the plains. Dumka, the fourth district of our focus, is part of the Santhal Pargana plateau, which forms part of the newly created Jharkhand State.

There could be number of social and economic factors determining the incentive structure in an area. The developments in the national and international level is obviously one such factor. We have earlier discussed in details how the stunted growth of sub-nationalism in Bihar has acted as a strong deterrent on the emergence of incentive structure in the region. One can think of several reasons for a region's surplus being utilised elsewhere. It could be either because the surplus is so small that it does not meet the minimum requirement of a non-agricultural enterprises, it could also be because of subjective factor, inertia or risk averting tendencies of those who control the surplus as is generally believed to be the case of a number of Zamindars in eastern India, including Bihar.<sup>21</sup> But the most important factor would probably be the extent of local market. Since Bihar did not form part of the enclave economies that British had created or even newer enclaves that were created during the post independent era, local market in Bihar could be generated only through its own growth process. For a growth in production, which could generate its own market it has to be sufficiently dispersed, so that large number of people are benefited by the growth process and hence create a market for their own product.

The agrarian scene in rural Bihar changed, with the changing structure of rural economy. Opinion maker with regional agenda could not emerge in the pre-independence period due to non-development of sub-nationalism. Further, the indifference of the upper caste elites towards industrial enterprise implied that their economic interests were inextricably linked with the agricultural enterprise. Although the 'Permanent Settlement' of 1793 was uniformly imposed on Bihar plains, its consequence on agricultural productivity varied from place to place depending on the ecological and demographic pressure. Unlike in the Rywatwari and Mahalwari area, the incentive structure in the Zamindari Settlement was generally absent. Over and above, the ecological factors in the south Bihar plain significantly determined the evolution of agrarian structure.<sup>22</sup>

On the other hand, the intensity of exploitation by the landlord which prevented the emergence of incentive structure, is also much more pronounced in south Bihar plain because of the nature of agricultural operations. Wet paddy is extensively cultivated here which is far more onerous and arduous than cultivation of wheat. It is no accident therefore that in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala even small proprietors have their land cultivated by others, whereas in Punjab and Haryana, self-cultivation is the general practice among the small cultivators.<sup>23</sup> Thus in the areas of wet

paddy cultivation, there has been marked tendency for women and then men to withdraw from agricultural work as soon as economic circumstances make it possible.<sup>24</sup> The most destitute section of the population which goes under the rubric 'Dalit', are labourers found in substantial numbers in the plains of Bihar. Even now south Bihar districts have highest proportion of 'Dalit' population. Landlords in this area are thus sensitive to any disturbances in the supply of labour who were systematically settled in the south Bihar plain for working as agricultural labourer. Occasional attempts by agricultural labourer to withdraw their labour have thus met with severe resistance. Landlords have not only resorted to coercion and violence to continue agricultural operations, but have also indulged in such repressive acts as rape just to demonstrate their absolute supremacy over the class of agricultural labourers.

The generation of considerable surplus in agriculture, because of natural fertility of the soil and assured irrigation, is a distinctive feature of the south Bihar Plains. The major part of irrigated areas in Bihar are former south Bihar districts — Shahabad, (Buxar) Gaya and Patna in particular, followed by South Bhagalpur and South Monghyr. As far as in 1929-33, these five districts together accounted for 71 percent of the total area irrigated in the whole state by all sources.<sup>25</sup> After independence too this area has remained the most irrigated.

In view of the higher increased productivity and surplus generation in agriculture, the pattern of appropriation as evolved in the Zamindari period was also distinctive in south Bihar plain. The practice of produce rent or *bhaoli* was widespread here. The *bhaoli* or produce rent was connected with the artificial system of irrigation. It was envisaged in the *bhaoli* system that the Zamindars will provide necessary capital for construction and maintenance of reservoir, water channel etc. To forestall the possibility of neglect by the Zamindar or indigenous irrigation, the tenant will give fixed share of the actual produce to Zamindars.<sup>26</sup>

While at the time of Permanent Settlement, about 90 percent of the total cultivated area in Bihar was under produce rent, it diminished to 75 percent by 1812. By 1910, it further shrunk to about 20 percent in the whole of Bihar. The *bhaoli* system could be more acceptable in south Bihar plain because the maintenance of indigenous irrigation system was less expensive. In contrast, organising irrigation facilities in North Bihar entailed massive investment for flood control, which was beyond the capacity of the local Zamindars. Thus surplus was also not being generated in

North Bihar agriculture sufficiently. This was essentially because the incentive structure in both the region had different social trajectory.

With the advent of independence, the agrarian scene appeared to be full of expectations. Fortunately, the capitalist strategy of transformation started paying some initial dividend.<sup>27</sup> India became internationally known for its state-sponsored community Development scheme.<sup>28</sup> The Community development movement implicitly assumed that individuals, groups and classes have common interest which are sufficiently strong to bring them together and that such conflicts as existed were generally reconcilable. These assumptions were, of course unrealistic. Thus, the better-off section of the rural society benefited most from the programmes and the disparity became even more visible there.<sup>29</sup> This approach had been critically described as ‘betting on the strong’<sup>30</sup> which aimed at betterment of the generally better-off traditional leaders of the rural society.

The new rural development strategy concentrated on the supply of modern inputs in agricultural sector. This strategy came to be known as the ‘Green Revolution’ with the support of the World Bank.<sup>31</sup> But, the agrarian development was successful only partially. This was the beginning of the ‘small farmer’<sup>32</sup> development policies aimed at the intermediate sections of the rural population. Another rationale for the development of ‘small farmers’ was the realisation of the objective of 5-6 percent growth in marketed surplus. Because a small farmer, defined as having up to two hectares of land, also had the potential for marketable surplus. The objective was 5-6 percent growth per annum in marketable surplus was however sought to be achieved mainly by raising yield of food crops by such modern inputs as fertiliser, improved seeds etc. Indeed, not only SFDA, but many other programme (like IADP, IRDP etc.) were all aimed towards this purpose, viz., raising production and marketable surplus.<sup>33</sup>

One important characteristic of these policies was the intended strengthening of economically viable nuclear ‘family unit’ farms which could counter pauperisation and possible proletarianisation. To give technological thrust to the agricultural productivity, under the auspices of the third five year plan the Intensive Agriculture District Programme (IADP), popularly known as the ‘Package Programme’ was started in Bihar only in Shahabad (of which Buxar District is a part) from October 1960. The IADP was launched to raise productivity through the advanced seed and

fertiliser technology.<sup>34</sup> In fact, even before IADP, Shahabad became the first area in Bihar where agriculture was 'modernised' through the construction of the 'Sone-Canal' system in the late 19th century.<sup>35</sup> Although, agriculture was considerably commercialised and made profitable, the continuing concentration of land in the hands of a few big *Rajput-Bhumihar* upper caste landlords had resulted in a Junker model of 'capitalism' from above. The agricultural prosperity increased the rental income of the zamindars and gave economic stability to at least some section of the population. Subsequently it became the important centre of the nationalist movement. Along with 'Junkerisation', there was also a tendency towards 'capitalism from below' by the tenant cultivators belonging largely to the 'backward caste' of *Koeri, Kurmi, Yadav* etc. Commercialisation of agriculture also led to increasing differentiation in the peasantry and de-peasantisation at the lowest level. Rich peasants have emerged as a formidable economic groups aided by the IADP projects. Medium, small and marginal peasants form the buffer between the rich peasants above and the landless peasants below.<sup>36</sup>

Not all the districts in south Bihar were initially under the IADP programme but natural fertility of the soil and irrigation facilities are comparatively higher in all these districts. Seed fertilizer technology was extended to the other areas subsequently. The effect of this strategy of agricultural development was very similar, namely increased productivity, higher marketable surplus and polarization of the peasantry. Rural entrepreneurs that emerged were the result of this capitalist transformation in agriculture. In the incentive structure of the society of South Bihar plain, literacy and educational endowment was a natural agenda. After all the 'Green Revolution' was paradigm shift of agricultural productivity and it was buttressed by movement of functional literacy.

The socio-economic profile of the districts of north Bihar plains (Begusarai and West Champaran) is, however, very different. The North-South divide between the plains, because of river Ganges, has significantly contributed to the economic backwardness of North Bihar districts. For example, the phenomenon of sharecropping is in extensive operation in the North Bihar districts of West Champaran, etc., where agriculture is generally inefficient and the strangle hold of feudal relationship are much pronounced. Geographical integration was key to the economic prosperity. But there were no attempts till recently to integrate the economies of the North and South Bihar. Where as there are number of bridges across the Ganges in adjoining state of Uttar Pradesh, only one road-cum-railway bridge was constructed in 1959 in Bihar, (at Mokama) and another road

bridge at Patna in the early eighties. These two bridges had connected Begusarai<sup>37</sup> and Champaran<sup>38</sup> of the North, with South Bihar Plains. While isolation of North Bihar districts have contributed to their backwardness, it has also resulted into captive markets comprising the districts of North Bihar, Nepal, North East and Eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh.

### **District-Specific Experience**

Begusarai : Situated very centrally within the state of Bihar, Begusarai is a relatively better off district, partly because of the industrial town of Barauni and the agricultural productivity of the district is also above the state average. In spite of such economic advantage, the social developments in the district were very limited and its literacy rate was barely 36.9 percent in 1991, the state-level achievement being 38.5 percent. By 2001, it has marginally surpassed the state literacy rate of 47.6 percent, recording a rate of 48.6 percent. The success of literacy campaign in the district was basically because of the organizational strength of its ZSS, which of course received the enthusiastic cooperation of the district Collector and the administration. The district did have a history of strong social movement, wherefrom could emerge a strong ZSS capable of shouldering the challenging task of a literacy campaign. Thanks to the existence of a large working class, the communist movement has been strong here, including in the rural areas. Begusarai was part of old district of Monghyr separated by the Ganges in South Bihar plain. It had witnessed some of the most powerful social and peasant movements. Increasingly, the Northern part of Monghyr (Begusarai) turned left and sent first Communist Legislature in Bihar assembly by-election way back in 1956. This district did not have a very substantial concentration of land, other than the Shivkumari Trust. Thus the peasant movement was not a very critical factor for the expansion of the Communists. But the district had a good history of social work, spearheaded by the Communists. Their intervention in the health sector and education was commendable. Departing from the normal norms, the Communist Party intervened during the Cholera epidemic in the sixties, almost an annual feature earlier; this helped in gaining a wide legitimacy in the area. Intervention expanded in the cultural sector as well. Here the social divide was not that pronounced. Begusarai could also forge ahead in the agricultural sphere. In Begusarai, an embankment was constructed for protecting its lowland from Ganga flood in the nineteenth century. This embankment has contributed to a relatively higher productivity of agriculture. Apart from public investment in embankment, the concentration of land in few hands is also relatively less in Begusarai, unlike in West Champaran. Nevertheless, the capitalist transformation in

agriculture was witnessed to some extent in Begusarai. In fact, commercialisation of agriculture has been spearheaded by the liberal brand of Congress and the Communist Party of India. Incidentally, two Ministers of Power and Irrigation belonged from this area in early fifties and late sixties. They were responsible for widespread tubewell irrigation and modernisation of agriculture. The society here had a powerful incentive structure, even though it was a part of the North Bihar plain. The incentive structure got further strengthened with establishment of three major industries, Oil Refinery, Fertiliser Factory and Thermal Power Station. Incidentally, the Fertiliser Factory is closed for the last couple of years. When the literacy campaign was initially being planned during mid-nineties, the left movement had become rather weak and a large number of social and political activists who were earlier associated with the movement were left without any social or political agenda. The ensuing literacy campaign at this point obviously appealed to them. Knowing their capabilities for organising social campaigns, the administration on the other hand ignored their political backgrounds and chose to extend invitation to them to join the literacy campaign. The hand holding between the administration and the ZSS was so voluntary in nature that neither has ever cared to declare its supremacy over the other. The ZSS in Begusarai is therefore one of the strongest and most effective ZSS in Bihar and its strong non-governmental component has ensured that its strength remains undisturbed even in the face of changes in the administration, notably the transfer of the Collectors.

Buxar and West Champaran : The literacy campaigns in Buxar and West Champaran had started much later, sometime during very late nineties. Of these, Buxar is a relatively prosperous district, situated as it is in the fertile south-west part of the state and West Champaran in a rather backward region, after the decline of sugar industries that was once the backbone of its economy. West Champaran is located in the North Bihar plain. Unlike Begusarai, the society in both Buxar and West Champaran is very much polarised. In spite of limited feudal stranglehold and capitalist transformation in agriculture, the society in Buxar is divided on the class and caste line. Being part of former Sahabad District, it had witnessed the Sepoy Mutiny, backward caste upsurge, peasant movement and radical left movements. This district also witnessed some of the most diabolic atrocities in the rural area. The civil society, though vibrant, was not prepared to take up autonomously class neutral developmental agenda like literacy. In contrast the feudal concentration is very high in West Champaran. The District of West Champaran was created as a separate District in 1972 from the old Champaran District, the place of Mahatma Gandhi's

historical Satyagarh movement. This district is bordering Nepal in the North and UP in the West. The overall literacy rate of the district is 39.63 percent, with the female literacy rate at 25.95 percent. The district has also substantial number of SC/ST population apart from persons from Muslim Community. Despite the history of great political movement, the district remains not only a poor literacy district but also one of the most backward districts of the state. In this district, majority of the rural mass are landless labourers. After the creation of the new district of West Champaran for Champaran, nearly all the Zamindari Estate, big or small, remained in this part of the district. During the entire period of colonial rule and until the Bihar Land Reforms Act of 1950, which abolished the 'intermediary' land rights between the peasant who cultivated the land and the state, the old Champaran was almost entirely the property of three large landlords, the Zamindars of Bettiah, Ramnagar and Mudhuban, who together owned almost three quarters of the district area. The remaining quarter, at the time of the cadestral survey, was subdivided between 1200 Zamindars, most of them of minor importance, who lived mainly in the Kesariya, Madhuban and Dhaka.<sup>39</sup> The 1991 literacy rates in Buxar and West Champaran were 47.2 and 28.0 percent, which rose to 57.5 and 39.6 percent in 2001. Although literacy rates were very different, the two districts were at the same plane vis-à-vis the existence of non-governmental organizations or social activists who could be mobilized towards the agenda of literacy. Thus the ZSS in both the districts had to depend heavily on the administrative support, although its members were drawn from various sections of the professionals, activists and social groups. In both the districts, the ZSS had the envious task of mobilizing the community without the support of literacy functionaries who were large in number, spread up to the villages and having right orientation towards the task. Interestingly, the Collectors in both the districts soon realized that, the usual model of mass mobilization of NLM being irrelevant here, an alternative had to be identified matching the usual structure of the administration. In both the district, this alternative was identified around the task of revenue administration, a routine task of the Collector and his staff, spread across from the district headquarters to the villages. Though the incentive structure around the revenue administration and agricultural production was contrasting, they both decided to introduce some additional dimension to the revenue administration, which would serve the interests of the marginalized sections so clearly that it moves them towards the administration. In case of Buxar, this additional dimension was the computerisation of the land records; the existing manual records being old, it was not easily accessible and prone to manipulation. Obviously, these difficulties affect more the land-poor population. The achievements, therefore, immediately



established the credibility of the administration and only then it started gradually mobilizing the people towards literacy campaign. In West Champaran, where the land distribution pattern is one of the most iniquitous, the felt need of the people was not so much the land records, as the landlessness. Therefore, the administration there had started substantive programme of land redistribution to the landless households. Over and above, administration also helped in liberating several bondage labourers.<sup>40</sup> The next stages of the programme had followed the same pattern as in Buxar.

Initially, the NLM used to suggest that the adult literacy campaign should be organised independently without any other development programme being its accompanying agenda. The rationale for the suggestion was to ensure full attention of the ZSS towards a single-agenda so that it could indeed be completed within a given time limit. But many Collectors or the ZSS, specially in the Hindi heartland states, had found this suggestion to be impractical. In this area, the state often had to play the role of a missing civil society organisation where the methods of mass mobilisation that a civil society organisation adopts are obviously not available to the district administration. Under such circumstances, the administration has no option than to ride on some dimension of its regular responsibilities, which touches most the felt needs of the general community.

Dumka : The district of Dumka was created in 1986 when a larger district of Santhal Pargana was divided into four smaller ones. Spread over an area of about 6.2 thousand square kilometer and sharing its boundaries with some districts of West Bengal, the district is basically an upland tract with the north-eastern tail of Rajmahal hills spreading through it. Thus less than one-third of its total land area is available for cultivation as compared to more than half in Bihar as a whole. Although the rainfall is not very scanty, the topography of the district does not allow retention of the annual precipitation. The irrigation facilities are thus very poor in Dumka, as surface water is not available and utilisation of ground water is a costly proposition there. In eastern part of the district, however, some canal irrigation is in existence, thanks to the Mayurakshi irrigation system, the major part of which benefits the adjacent district (Birbhum) of West Bengal. In recent past, efforts have been made to dig a large number of wells, to cater to both minor irrigation and drinking water needs, bringing some relief to the farmers. The forest resource endowment of Dumka is, of course, relatively higher as 11.8 percent of the geographical area is covered by

forests; but this resource base is getting slowly depleted because of its over-commercial exploitation. Mineral deposits in the district are rather limited, although adjoining districts in both Bihar and West Bengal have more of it.

The economy of the district is almost entirely based on agriculture, employing as it does nearly 85 percent of its workers. With irrigation facilities being limited and costly, the agricultural economy is based on rain-fed single-crop cultivation practices. The prospect of animal husbandry as a subsidiary activity is also limited here as grazing lands are difficult to be found in the hilly terrain. The subsistence nature of the economy forces many of its workers to migrate, either permanently or for temporary periods. Besides limited area available for cultivation and poor irrigation, the district also suffers from a number of other infrastructural bottlenecks hindering any growth of non-agricultural economic activities there. For example, the railway network is practically non-existent in the district and Dumka town happens to be one of those rare district head quarters in the country which is not accessible through the railway. Even the road network is much thinner in Dumka (0.37 kms per sq.km.) than in whole of Bihar/Jharkhand (0.49 kms). Many other infrastructural facilities for education, health and other development needs are again very poor in Dumka. However, thanks to the policy of the government, at least banks have reached the people of Dumka.<sup>41</sup>

A subsistence agricultural economy, smaller villages (as would normally occur in hilly terrains) and a sizeable tribal population (mostly Santhals) are the three important characteristics that largely determine the social structure of the district, leaving aside of course the tiny urban population where other factors may also be relevant. As regards the size of tribal population, it is more than 40 percent in the district and, obviously, for rural areas the figure would be even higher. Together with about 7 percent of the population belonging to the scheduled castes, these two specially disadvantaged sections (i.e. scheduled tribes and scheduled castes) constitute nearly half of the total population, as against nearly one-fifth for Bihar as a whole. In the rural areas, of course, this would be even higher. The tribal culture of gender equality implies a healthier sex ratio in the district as well as a higher work participation rate among the females. To that, one should also add that economic inequalities are also less among the tribals and, consequently, the tribal communities are generally a more cohesive social unit than the non-tribal. In many tribal villages, an informal traditional local self-government would be seen to function even now,

ensuring certain order in community behaviour. The relatively smaller size of the village in Dumka is yet another factor which probably enhances the cohesiveness of this basic social unit. Broad estimates would indicate that whereas the average population of a village in Dumka would be less than 300, the same would be nearing 1000 persons for Bihar as a whole.

Yet another implication of the tribal nature of the district is a number of special development programmes meant for tribal people only. Although the past experience would indicate that most of these development programmes fail to benefit its targetted population, because of bureaucratic apathy or unscrupulous middle men, it is quite likely that in the changed social atmosphere under the mass literacy campaign, these may provide the rural community with a ready opportunity to channelise their development initiative.

The 2001 census records of the district suggest that 87 percent of Bihar's population still live in rural areas and thus issues related to land and agriculture are probably the most critical issues here. This statement is certainly generally true, but not invariably so. If the literacy campaign in Dumka (earlier in Bihar, but now in Jharkhand) had followed this assumption, then it would not have probably achieved those results in literacy campaign which won them a national award. With a sizeable population of scheduled caste and tribes (the two together making nearly half of the population), Dumka is one of the most backward districts in the country and, as in Buxar and West Champaran, the literacy campaign had to be organised here mainly by the district administration, in the absence of any able non-governmental organisation. But, notwithstanding the absolute dominance of agriculture, absence of land or land records was not the main problem facing its people. Although unequally distributed, majority of the households are endowed with some cultivable land and, by virtue of being administered under the Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act, the land records are not that poor. Here the incentive structure is not inbuilt in the society. However, the administration here had to look for development issues which were most dear to the people of Dumka. The administration had first found it in the district's disappearing or deteriorating water bodies which are crucial because of great depths at which ground-waters can be found here. Thus initially mass mobilisation in Dumka had started along the programme of redigging of the existing wells and tanks. This was a rather short-tenured task and hence the ZSS there had to identify a second need around which sustained mobilisation activities could be organised. This time it was the women's thrift and credit societies which are an extremely potent strategy to fight the menace

of rural moneylenders that are most active in areas with substantial tribal population.<sup>42</sup> The choice of these two development issues was so very appropriate that Dumka is one of those very few districts where the womenfolk were the stronger part of the ZSS. Remembering the fact that during the initial part of the campaign, the district had difficulties in finding adequate number of non-governmental members for its ZSS, it is a remarkable achievement for Dumka to now have a ZSS which is indeed an autonomous organisation.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The literacy campaign are not yet over and the government has recently declared the new target of the NLM as making India reach a literacy rate of 75 percent by the end of Tenth Plan, i.e., 2007. That apart, a scheme of Continuing Education is in operation in many districts of the country where total literacy campaigns have been completed successfully. With the campaign proceeding further and acquiring new dimensions, more administrative lessons are likely to emerge in future. But one single lesson that NLM has already convincingly taught us is about the possibility of community participation in development programme. We now know, thanks to literacy campaigns, that community participation is not merely a theoretical concept, it is indeed translatable into practice.

All that it needs is an appropriate institution to act as a vehicle of people's participation and an innovative strategy to sensitise and mobilise people for a social action. In case of literacy campaigns, the ZSS had played that crucial role of an institution and the variety of programmes for environment building had accomplished the second task of social mobilisation. The NLM experience has also shown that for any activity, be it individual or social, one needs an appropriate incentive structure. In a typically developed region, this incentive structure emerges from the adequate economic opportunities that lie in the region; in backward regions, however, such incentives have to be provided by the development programmes or administrative services.

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