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CHAPTER-5

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES OF EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL (INDIA) AND BANGLADESH

5.1. West Bengal and Bangladesh—A Profile

West Bengal is a State of Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic of India that came into force as a result of Indian Independence Act, 1947. Actually, with the execution of independence, the country of India was divided into different units including States, Union Territories and National Capital Territory for administrative purposes. Accordingly the State of West Bengal was formed under Indian Unions of States as per article 1(1) of Indian Constitution. As a part of the Republic, the State is therefore, governed by Indian Constitution, which has been adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 26th November 1949 (GOI, 1995:11).

West Bengal is situated in the northeast part of India covering the land area of 88,752 square kilometres. It is bounded on the north by Sikkim and Bhutan, on the east by Assam and Bangladesh, on the south by the Bay of Bengal and Orissa, on the west by Bihar and on the northeast by Nepal. According to 1991 Census, this State is inhabited by 68.07 million persons and it ranks fourth in population amongst the States and Union Territories of India. The three States ahead of West Bengal in respect of total population are Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra. Considering the 2.2 per cent annual growth rate, it is estimated that the population of West Bengal reached at 75.16 million with a density of 847 persons per square kilometre in 1996. Thus West Bengal has become the most densely populated area in India except the 5 Union Territories (India 1998:9).

For administrative purposes, West Bengal is divided into 4 Divisions and 17 Districts. Among the districts, Darjeeling is the only one that is mostly covered by hills. And except this hilly district, the climate of West Bengal is dominated by seasonally reversing monsoons. Like other parts of India, heterogeneous peoples in respect of ethnic origins, languages, religions and traditions inhabit in West Bengal. But the dominant majority belongs to Hinduism that covers 74.72 per cent of the State's population followed by 23.61 per cent Muslims. Population belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are 23.62 per cent and 5.59 per cent respectively. Here 85.99 per cent population mainly speak in Bengali followed by 6.58 per cent Hindi, 2.73 per cent Santali, 2.14 per cent Urdu, 1.24 per cent Nepali and 1.3 per cent others (Director of Census Operation, W.Bengal).

West Bengal possesses a dominant agrarian economy as agriculture plays the pivotal role in the State's income. Here nearly 55 per cent of the total population are directly or indirectly involved in agriculture and they contribute about 50 per cent of the national income (Year Book 1999:604). The State occupies 2.77 per cent of Indian land while it accommodates 8.06 per cent of the Indian population. But it accounted for 64.5 per cent of the jute and 21.3 per cent of tea production of the country in 1995-96. The State occupies a leading position among the principal rice growing states of India by contributing 14.9 per cent of the total production of rice in 1995-96. Among others, important crops include potatoes, oilseeds, betel-leaves, tobacco, wheat, barley and maize. West Bengal is also one of the major industrial states in India with 10,236 registered working factories and 453,831 small-scale industries up to 31 March 1995 (Census of India, Series-26, Paper 1 of 1991:91 and India 1998:653).

On the other hand Bangladesh is a nature captivating deltaic land on the north of the Bay of Bengal covering an area of 147,570 square kilometres. It is emerged on March 26, 1971 as an independent country in the world's map following a Great War of liberation. It lies on the northeastern part of South Asia between $20^{\circ}34'$ and $26^{\circ}38'$ north latitude and $88^{\circ}01'$ and $92^{\circ}41'$ east longitude. The country shares the boarder with India on the west, north and northeast; Myanmar on the southeast and is washed by the Bay of Bengal on the south. Except the hilly regions in the northeast and southeast and some high lands in the north and northeastern part, Bangladesh is essentially a flat alluvial plain crisscrossed by numerous of rivers. Its climate is dominated by seasonally reversing monsoons. But the fertile delta is frequented by natural calamities such as flood, cyclone, tidal-bore and drought.

According to 1996 estimation, Bangladesh is inhabited by a population of 122.1 million and has one of the highest population densities of 828 persons per square kilometre in the world. Here, the religion of the dominant majority is Islam that captures 88.3 per cent of the total population. The largest minority belongs to Hinduism sharing 10.5 per cent of the total population. The rest are Buddhist and Christian who conjointly occupy 1.2 per cent only (BBS, 1999:28). Thus a small fraction of this population consists of several ethnic groups with distinct language, race, religion and custom. Yet Bangladesh is specially recognized for the potential bond of linguistic and cultural homogeneity among its vast population. It is because, the language spoken by the people except very few from tribal origins is Bengali that provides the basic ingredients of national identity supported by a rich literature and culture.

Bangladesh is also well known for its dominant agrarian economy as it provides employment to about 66 per cent of the workforce and contributes nearly 34 per cent of GDP (GOB, 1994:1). The technology in agricultural production is changing though it is constrained by low investment and by small peasant holdings. On account of natural calamities, political instability, pressure of over population as well as slow economic progress, the people of this country were trapped in the vicious circle of poverty. But in the recent years with the establishment of political stability, the economy is making an ascending trend and has already registered per capita GNP of US\$283 followed by a GDP growth rate of 5.7 per cent in 1996-97 fiscal year (DNFE, 1998:1). Moreover, the Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) that takes the country into the 21st Century has made the target of economic growth over 7 per cent (UNIC, November 1997:4).

However, a small band of indigenous middle class dominates the society of Bangladesh. Increasing outreach of radio, television and other mass media as well as cross-culture contact has induced modernization. After long years of political unrest and autocratic rule, the country has been ushered into a system of parliamentary democracy (GOB, July 1997:7-8). At present an elected government accountable to the parliament governs Bangladesh. The governance is unitary in character with powers centralized in the capital though administration through civil service reaches from the highest policy making bodies to the lowest implementing organs. The present democratic government is committed to devolution of decision making power to local governments, and local government institutions are yet to be formulated in the proposed four tiers (GOB, December 1999).

5.2. National Contexts of Literacy

West Bengal bears a rich heritage of literacy standard. History reveals that various programmes for eradication of illiteracy were attempted in this area since long past by different authorities. There were night schools and adult education centres in the regions of greater Bengal even before India's winning freedom from the colonial oppression of the British. As a result, after the independence of India when West Bengal flourished as a State, its literacy rate was found far better than the country's average. More specifically, at that time West Bengal ranked second position among the States and Union Territories of India in respect of literacy rate (Uttar Banga Sangbad, 30.12.2000).

It is evident that during pre-independence period when West Bengal was a part of the province of Bengal under British India, the then government introduced and implemented there a distinct approach of education what is now known as modern education system. The Wood's Educational Dispatch of 1854 may be noted as a significant example of that modern approach of education in Bengal. According to this approach a Government-funded Education Department was established under a Director and posts of inspectors were created. The Dispatch also had a plan encouraging private educational facilities. Lord Curzon took some steps for expanding Primary education. In 1910, Gopal Krishna Gokhale placed a bill in the Law Council for making primary education compulsory. The bill was, however, rejected in 1912. Later on, in 1919, a bill making primary education compulsory in the municipal areas was passed. Accordingly, with the provision of limited autonomy in the Indian Book Act of 1921, Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act was passed in 1930. For over a decade after this, there was hardly any follow up action.

Later on, Zilla (District) School Boards were set up to control, direct and manage the primary schools for reaching the ultimate goal of universal, compulsory and free education. Although Primary education was controlled, directed and managed by the Director of Public Instruction, and the schools were inspected by the District, Subdivision or Circle Offices (comprising 1 or more thanas), direct administrative responsibility was laid solely with the Zilla School Boards. After the Second World War, the Sergeant Commission Report for the development of education was published. It was the first report to recognize pre-primary education. But with the end of British rule in India, the Sergeant Commission Report became ineffective in 1947.

However, the Government of Independent India showed keen interest on mass education by making constitutional provision of State yielding free and compulsory education within a period of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution to all children until they complete the age of 14 years. It is of worthy note that in the early post-independence period, a major concern of the Government of India and of the States was to impart increasing attention on education considering it as the most vital factor to national progress. During this phase, several committees and commissions (notably the University Education Commission of 1952-53) reviewed the problems of educational reconstruction. To implement the recommendations of those commissions, some steps were taken. Moreover, the Government of India, with a view to fulfilling the constitutional obligation, revised the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1968 in 1976 and the latest by 1992 with definite Programmes of Action (POA) and enhanced budgetary allocation (GOI, 1998:69; Nanda, 1982:389).

But it's an interesting note that before 1976, education was exclusively the responsibility of the States, the Central Government was concerned with coordination and determination of standards of technical and higher education only. Through a constitutional amendment in 1976, education has been transformed as the joint responsibility of the Centre and the concerned State. The latest NPE and POA envisage that free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality should be provided to all children up to the age of 14 years before the commencement of 21st century. Plan outlay on education increased from Rs. 153 crore in the First Five Year Plan to Rs. 19,600 crore in the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) which is 2.6 times higher than the Seventh Plan. The expenditure on education as per cent of GDP also rose from 0.7 per cent in 1951-52 to 3.3 per cent in 1995-96. With the above trend, the Central Plan outlay for education has been substantially increased from Rs. 1,825 crore in 1995-96 to Rs. 3,383 crore in 1996-97 and to Rs. 4,095 crore in 1997-98 (GOI, 1998:69).

As the education policies aimed to promote national progress, a sense of common citizenship and culture, and to strengthen national integration, the Central as well as State Governments have also laid stress on the need for a radical reconstruction of the educational system. Since the adoption of new strategies, considerable expansion in educational facilities all over the country at all levels is being felt. It is noticed that the State Government of West Bengal began educational activities considering the ringing words of Jawaharlal Nehru that the task ahead included the "ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity". One of the means adopted for translating this vision into reality was setting up the target of the free and compulsory primary education.

If we cast our eyes over Bangladesh it becomes evident to us that this part of greater Bengal too has a long heritage of literacy endeavours. There were night schools and adult education centres in the early years of the twentieth century. Until the seventies, more than hundred literacy materials were developed both by the government and the private bodies (DNFE, May 1998:2). It is evident that during pre-independence period when Bangladesh was a province of Pakistan the then central government at the National Educational Conference in 1947 put forward a resolution to make primary education universal, compulsory and free of cost. Later on the said government adopted some measures in favour of the resolution. However, the issue of universal access to primary education was especially stressed in the First Five Year Plan of Pakistan and accordingly a Education Commission was set up in 1959. In the Second and Third Five Year Plans, there were also increased allocations for the development of Primary Education to enhance facilities in the schools and to provide for greater student enrolment (DPE, July 1998:5).

But it is an agonizing fact that the major portion of the allocation had been used to establish numerous educational institutions in West Pakistan by the then Pakistani rulers who showed indifferent attitude towards East Pakistan ie present Bangladesh in respect of establishing such institution there. As a result the leaders of newly born Bangladesh inherited very poor educational infrastructure left behind by the previous rulers. Thus they were burdened with the enormous and difficult responsibility of educating the people of the war-torn, devastated and poor nation. They, however, with the inspiration of freedom movement, were wholeheartedly engaged to discharge the responsibility.

In fact, soon after the emergence of independence, the lawmakers of Bangladesh presented an admirable Constitution that came into force on 4th November 1972. Article 17 of this Constitution unequivocally declared, "The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of (a) establishing a uniform, mass-oriental and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage or may be determined by law; (b) relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs; and (c) removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law".

Accordingly, an Education Reform Commission was set up in Bangladesh in 1972 under the chairmanship of Dr. Qudrat-E-Khuda, a great scholar. The Commission submitted its report in 1974 where the main objectives of education were outlined from the view points of moral, economic, and national obligations of the earners. The Commission also imparted top priority on primary education and placed suggestions for:

- (1) Universal Primary Education upto Class-VIII.
- (2) To attract a greater number of female students, appoint female teachers at the primary level; if needed build girls' schools.
- (3) Implementation of Compulsory Primary Education by 1980 and extension of it upto Class-VIII by 1983.
- (4) Adopt strict measures for prevention of drop-outs. Establish an attractive curriculum and proper environment in schools.
- (5) Introduction of a uniform system of education that must be scientific, realistic and compatible with social conditions and environmental needs.
- (6) Expansion of the teachers training system and development of appropriate textbooks.

- (7) Introduction of pre-primary education.
- (8) Setting up a Primary Education Academy and a National Primary Education Board.

It is of worthy note that on the basis of the Commission's recommendations, the Government in 1973 nationalized 33,165 primary schools and declared 167,724 teachers of those schools as Government employees. From then on, strengthening and improving primary education management became a part of state's responsibilities. Moreover, an overall educational reform was about to take place in 1975 in accordance with the Commission's recommendations. But unfortunately the plan of action suffered a setback due to a radical change in political power resulted from the brutal killing of the father of nation, Bangabandhu Sheik Mujibur Rahman, and his family members on 15th August 1975, (DPE, July 1998:6-7).

Later on, an organized literacy initiative was started in 1980. The initiative again experienced a brief closure between 1982 and 1987 when it was reviewed as a pilot project in 27 selected upazillas. Government of Bangladesh, however, considering literacy as an essential input in national development adopted a two-pronged policy-universalization of primary education and liquidation of illiteracy. Compulsory Primary Education Act was promulgated in 1990 which was made effective in 68 upazillas in 1992 and all over the country since 1993. Meanwhile, a new division entitled Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) was created 1992 with the end to promote and oversee countrywide implementation and expansion of Primary and Mass Education. Subsequently under the newly created PMED, integrated Non-formal Education Programme was implemented during 1991-97 aiming at developing an infrastructure in NFE sub-sector (DNFE, May 1998:3).

5.3. Existing Systems of Education

The constitution of India embodies the principles on which the National System of Education is conceived of. It implies that, up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex, have access to education of a comparable quality. Although appropriately funded programmes and effective measures in the direction of Common School System recommended in the 1968 Policy has been initiated by the Central Government of India, a little variation among the States in respect of the duration of different courses is evident.

In West Bengal, the existing system of education seems much agreeable with Central Policy. Broadly, the system of education is constituted here with the learning levels of elementary, secondary and higher education. Apart from these levels, an additional level of pre-primary education is practised by some private institutions. However, the elementary level of education is composed of 8 years of schooling from grade I to VIII. It is further divided into primary level and junior secondary level. Regarding the break-up of primary and junior secondary levels there is a little variation among different educational institutions.

Generally primary and junior secondary levels cover four years of schooling each, ranging from Grade I to IV and grade V to VIII respectively. Primary education is preferably started at the age of 6 and imparted at the primary schools existing independently. But in a few cases junior secondary or secondary schools incorporate primary education within the same premises where the range of primary school is extended up to grade V. Primary schools that belong to this category are known as Junior Basic School.

The level of secondary education in this State is also composed of two stages: (a) High School (Grade IX to X) and (b) Higher Secondary (Grade XI to XII). But most secondary schools use to impart education of both junior secondary level and high school level and thus cover 6 years of schooling from Grade V to X. Higher Secondary level of education is imparted in a few schools that are called higher secondary schools. At the secondary level most institutions are non-governmental but largely dependent on government grants. The State Government of West Bengal use to pay the total salary of the teachers as well as non-teaching staffs.

As in other States, higher education in West Bengal includes education at post higher secondary level (after Grade XII). This level of education comprises the courses of studies (a) 2 years ordinary bachelor degree under Pass Course (B.A., B.Com., B.Sc. etc); (b) 3 years specialized degree under Honours Course in Arts, Science and Commerce; (c) 4-5 years professional degree in Medicine, Engineering, Agriculture and Law etc.; (d) Master's degree (duration 2 years); (e) M. Phil and Ph.D. degree (duration 2 years for M. Phil and 3 years for Ph.D.). Contextually it is of interesting note that at present only external candidates are allowed to appear at the 2 years ordinary bachelor degree examinations in this State. On the other hand this type of bachelor degree holders are not allowed to get themselves admitted into the master's degree courses unless they pass 2 years Special Honours Course. There is also a provision of receiving additional graduation in 1 subject. The duration of such course is 1 year, but the degree holders under this category should score at least 60 per cent marks for enrolment into later stage in the same subject.

Parallel to general system, there is a traditional system of Madrasha Education for the Muslims. The interesting fact to note is that the madrashas are not of homogenous character, rather those are divided into three categories under three schools of theological learning. These schools are Bareilvi, Deobandi and Ahel-e-Hadish. Generally, Arabic language and Islamic theology based subjects are taught in those madrashas. But there are some madrashas recognized and aided by the government which follow the curricula and syllabuses formulated by the Madrasha Education Board. As madrashas were primarily initiated for expanding Islamic education among the Muslims, the government of West Bengal initially considered Islamic education to be the focal issue at all levels of government controlled madrashas. But later on, to meet the demand of the age, the government has introduced there various secular subjects, viz language and literature, history, philosophy, economics, psychology, mathematics and science etc.

Vocational and technical learning expanded in three tiers (certificate, diploma and degree) is also existing in West Bengal. Besides, there are teachers training education which comprises: (a) one-year Certificate in Education Course (after Grade XII); (b) two-year Bachelor of Education Course (after degree course); and (c) one-year Master of Education Course (after Bachelor of Education Course). In recent times, Non-Formal Education (NFE) has emerged as a distinct and complementary system to the formal sub-sector of education all over the State enlisting commitments and endeavours of the government and a number of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Currently Mass Education Extension Department and State Literacy Mission Authority are implementing non-formal education schemes for the boys and girls of 9-14 years.

On the other end the existing system of education in Bangladesh in real sense is diversified with an English medium modern method for a privileged few, a backward religious programme for the underprivileged orthodox and a change-expecting secular arrangement for the rest. Broadly, the system of education in Bangladesh is constituted with three levels of learning, viz primary, secondary and higher education though an additional level of pre-primary education is practised by some private institutions. Primary education covers five years of schooling from Grade I to V preferably started at the age of 6. Generally, primary schools exist independently, but in some cases secondary or junior secondary schools incorporate primary education within their premises (Muhith, 1999:132). However, primary education has been made compulsory in 1993 by an enactment in the parliament though the enactment has not become effective till today.

Here, secondary education is composed of three stages: (a) Junior Secondary (Grade VI to VIII), (b) Secondary (Grade IX to X) and (c) Higher Secondary (Grade XI to XII). But most secondary schools cover five years of schooling from Grade-VI to X ie till the appearance at the Secondary School Certificate Examination. Higher Secondary education is imparted mostly in Intermediate Colleges though some Degree Colleges cover that course. There are also Cadet Colleges administered by the Ministry of Defence. These colleges are residential in character and they impart education from Grade-VII to XII. They follow the usual academic curricula and as feeder institutions of Armed Forces, emphasize pre-military military training and discipline. At the secondary level most institutions are non-governmental but largely dependent on government grants (Muhith, 1999:133).

In Bangladesh higher education includes education at post higher secondary level (after Grade XII). This level of education comprises the following courses of studies (a) 2 years ordinary first degree under Pass Course (B.A., B.Com., and B.Sc. etc); (b) 4 years specialized degree (previously 3 years) under Honours Course in Arts, Science and Commerce; (c) 4-5 years professional degree in Medicine, Engineering and Agriculture etc.; (d) Master's degree (duration 1 or 2 years depending on the course tenure of the first degree obtained); and (e) M. Phil and Ph.D. degree (duration 2 years for M. Phil and 3 years for Ph.D.).

In addition to these, there exist vocational and technical education expanded in three tiers viz certificate, diploma and degree. Besides, there is teachers' training education comprising (a) one-year Certificate in Education Course (after Grade-X for females and Grade XII for males); (b) one-year Bachelor of Education Course (after degree course); and (c) one-year Master of Education Course (after Bachelor of Education Course). Parallel to general system, there is a traditional system of Madrasha Education which is of total 16 years duration (5 years Ebtedayee, 5 years Dakhil, 2 years Alim, 2 years Fazil and 2 years Kamil). There are also religious educational institutions for the Hindus, Christians and Buddhists (GOB, July 1997:2).

However, in recent times, Non-Formal Education (NFE) has emerged as a distinct and complementary system to the formal sub-sector of education all over the country enlisting commitments and endeavours of the government and a number of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). Currently Directorate of Non-Formal Education is implementing four non-formal education projects for the peoples of different age groups.

5.4. Education Policies and Related Measures

Since the dawn of independence the Government of India is much convinced about the burning necessity of a radical reconstruction of education on the broad lines recommended by the Education Commission for establishing secular and socialistic ideals for ensuring national integration as well as socio-economic development of the country. Accordingly in 1968, government adopted a National Policy on Education in harmony with the following principles (Nanda, 1982:389-395).

- (a) Declaration of free and compulsory primary education;
- (b) Fixation of appropriate educational qualification and satisfactory emoluments for the teachers;
- (c) Development of regional, national and international languages under three-language formula;
- (d) Equalization of educational opportunities among the peoples irrespective of region, sex, religion and caste;
- (e) Identification of talents for cultivation of talents;
- (f) More emphasis on work-experience and national service including participation in community works;
- (g) Giving priority on science education and research;
- (h) Provisions for education in agriculture and industry;
- (i) Improvement of the quality of books with low price;
- (j) Improvement of reliability and validity of examinations;
- (k) Extension of opportunities in secondary education along with facilities for technical and vocational training;
- (l) Establishment of new universities with ample provision of funds and special attention on higher education;
- (m) Development of part-time education and corresponding courses on a large scale at the university level;
- (n) Emphasis on spread of literacy and adult education;
- (o) Priority on games and sports for improving the physical fitness and sportsmanship of average students;

- (p) Protection and promotion of education of minorities;
- (q) Suggestions for the 10+2+3 education structure;
- (r) Investment on education to 6 per cent of GNP;
- (s) Coordinated programmes of Central sector and State Government for human resource development;
- (t) Provisions of education policy review at every 5 years.

It is of important note that the above education policy has been revised by the Government of India latest by 1992 with a modified Programme of Action. The latest modification resolves to ensure free and compulsory education of satisfactory quality to all children up to 14 years before entering the 21st century. In order to execute the revised policy of the government, the following three sub-schemes were proposed under Operation Blackboard during the Eighth Plan: (i) continuation of the ongoing scheme to cover all the remaining schools identified as on 30th September 1986; (ii) expanding the scope of the scheme to provide three rooms and three teachers in primary schools with enrolment exceeding 100 with provision for about 50 per cent women teachers in primary schools as mandatory for all States/UTs; (iii) extending the scope of the scheme to upper primary schools. The expanded schemes have been started since 1993-94 (India 1998:70-71).

The State Government of West Bengal, in accordance with the education policies adopted by the Central Government of India, has taken a lot of educational programmes throughout the State. Among those, the programme of Universalization of Elementary Education has received the highest attention. Further, the main focus of this programme has been shifted from enrolment per se to retention and achievement. The Programme also envisages a package of quality improvement.

Education has also received remarkable impetus in Bangladesh where the government has given due importance to the development of human resources and declared the aim to eradicate illiteracy within 10 years, improve the quality of education, emphasize science and technology in the curriculum, improve the working conditions of teachers and formulate an education policy. With a view to making education for all by 2000 a success, the Government of Bangladesh have been very sincerely striving to encourage full participation of children of Grades I and II especially in the remote and rural areas. Four thousand satellite schools have been established at their doorsteps. A special programme of 'Food for Education' has been introduced at primary level to bring the children of poor and distressed families under the umbrella of 'Compulsory Primary Education' (Ahmed and Wahab, 1997:208-210).

In the Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002), the education strategy of the government has been outlined on the basis of fundamental principle of 'Education for All' by the year 2000. Accordingly the strategy has imparted the highest emphasis on primary education, mainly to bring all rural villages and urban mahallas under the cover of compulsory, uniform and free primary education programme. Sufficient importance has also been paid on the issues of massive and continuous training of teachers at primary and secondary levels, involvement of local government bodies in the management of primary and secondary institutions, reduction of drop-out rates at primary and secondary schools and minimization of gender gaps and regional imbalances from all levels of education. A mass oriented National Education Policy affixing the above attributes has been prepared and presented for Cabinet approval (GOB, December 1999:21).

However, the following important issues are included in the latest National Education Policy of Bangladesh:

- Achieving 62 per cent adult literacy by the year 2000;
- Extending the period of elementary education from the present 5 years to 8 years in course in time;
- Recruiting competent young people, especially more female teachers at the elementary level;
- Adequately strengthening teachers' education and providing high quality pre-service training;
- Restructuring secondary education covering grades 9-12;
- Introducing compulsory science teaching for all boys and girls up to grade 10;
- Introducing appropriate technology to create skilled manpower in rural areas to meet local needs;
- Stressing on life-oriented vocational education and work-experience of the learners; and
- Undertaking action-oriented research on education.

As to reduce gender gap in enrolment into different levels of education through providing financial support as well as increased employment opportunities to women, the governmental steps in Bangladesh are summed up below:

1. To recruit and appoint 60 per cent female teachers at the primary level, 40 per cent at the secondary level and at least 10 per cent at college and university levels;
2. To introduce free education and offer stipends to all female students up to grade 10;
3. To build separate hostel buildings for girl students in each Teachers' Training College and Primary Training institute;
4. To establish separate Vocational Training Institutes and Polytechnic Institutes for the girl students.

5.5. Priorities and Strategies of Education

The Directive Principle in Article 45 of the Indian Constitution prescribed that 'the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of 10 years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years.' Moreover, the government of India as a participant to the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtein, Thailand in 1990; as the organizer to the EFA Summit Conference of Nine High Population Countries held in New Delhi, in 1993; and as a signatory to the Declarations thereof, is committed to achieve the goals of EFA within the shortest possible time.

More specifically, India has set an ambitious target of attaining complete literacy by the year 2005. This means enrolling and retaining all children within the age group 6-14 to grade VIII level, and providing functional literacy to more than 100 million adults in the age group of 15-35. A Constitutional amendment has made elementary education an inalienable right of all children in order to attain the goal of UPE and eradicate illiteracy. The Government has adopted strategies and initiated actions to attain this goal. The National Policy on Education as revised latest in 1992, set out the guiding principles and strategies for basic education in India. Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) has also facilitated the implementation of the National Education Policy by allocating 40 per cent of the education budget to elementary level. This underlines the growing involvement of the central government in primary and secondary education. To implement the 1986 NPE, the government initiated a series of grant programmes such as Operation Blackboard and TLCs.

Following the central policies and directions, the State Government of West Bengal has also paid much importance on Operation Blackboard and Total Literacy Campaign to achieve the EFA goals. Operation Blackboard was launched in 1987 with the goal of ameliorating the school environment and improving the retention and learning achievement of children. Since 1993-94, this programme has been extended to cover upper primary school as well. In 1988, the Government created the National Literacy Mission (NLM) in order to replace the Centre-Based Project by Total Literacy Campaign (TLC). The objective of the programme is to make at least 80 per cent of the non-literate persons belonging to the age group of 9-14 or 15-35 of a particular area (be it a district or block) "literate" as per the literacy norms fixed by the NLM (GOWB, 1999:24).

The State of West Bengal took up the campaign for total literacy in right earnest with effect from September 1990. The TLCs have certain salient features which make them unique and distinguishable from other Literacy Programmes. It envisages a short course to help the neo-literates to achieve NLM norms. While literacy is the first step to achieve awareness and functionality, its attainment is not an end in itself. So, the Government of West Bengal has taken necessary measures for a Post-Literacy Campaign (PLC) to retain and upgrade skills and knowledge of the neo-literates through different sorts of Post-Literacy Programmes. According to recent directives of the NLM, the Post-Literacy Programme should henceforth be regarded as a preparatory phase for Continuing Education Programme (CEP) and, therefore, would run for one year only. In 1996, the NLM introduced this programme in order to create opportunities of lifelong education to the neo-literates (GOWB, 1999:25-26).

Following the constitutional provision of India the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh too enjoins upon the state to provide basic education to the citizens and eradicate illiteracy within a given time. Besides, as a participant to the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtein, Thailand in 1990; World Conference on Children's Right held in New York in 1990 and EFA Summit Conference of Nine High Population Countries held in New Delhi, India in 1993; and as a signatory to the declarations thereof, the government of Bangladesh is committed to achieve the goals of EFA by the year 2000. And considering literacy as an essential input in national development, the Government of Bangladesh has already adopted a two pronged policy for universalization of primary education and eradication of illiteracy throughout the country. Specific strategies have been developed to address major identified problems like low-enrolment (particularly of girls), low attendance and high drop-out in the primary school (GOB, July 1997:3).

In Bangladesh some specific national targets have been set for Education for All by the Year 2000 covering the areas of enrolment in general, enrolment of girls, dropout and 5 year primary cycle completion, and adult literacy. The following are the tentative national targets (DNFE, 1998:3):

1. To raise gross enrolment rate from 76 per cent (1991) to 95 per cent.
2. To raise female gross enrolment rate from 70 per cent (1991) to 94 per cent.
3. To reduce drop-out rate at primary level from 60 per cent (1991) to 30 per cent.
4. To raise adult literacy rate from 35 per cent (1991) to 62 per cent.

To achieve the above targets, Compulsory Primary Education Act was promulgated in 1990 and in 1991 Integrated Non-Formal Education Project (INFEP) was launched to ensure countrywide expansion of Non-Formal Education (NFE). In 1992, a separate ministry styled as the Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) was created which is implementing NFE programme as a part of INFEP. In view of the success and experience and to set up a permanent NFE infrastructure, the INFEP has been upgraded to the Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) on September 1995 (DNFE, September 1998:2).

In persuasion, the government of Bangladesh has decided to provide primary education facilities for an additional 5.84 million 6-10 year old learners by the year 2000, and basic literacy programmes to some 26 million adults. Further, the present government is committed to achieve a total literacy programme by the year 2006. In setting the EFA targets, the government has prioritized non-formal education to eradicate mass illiteracy and to carry on continuing education. It is planned that the targets for primary education will be met through the formal primary school system with supplementary support from non-formal education, for the former drop-outs and non-starters (DNFE, May 1998:3).

The Government of Bangladesh has also undertaken various steps to establish a well organized pre-primary level education for the 4-5 year age group to increase future enrolment at the primary level; educate 6-10 year old who are out of school or school drop-outs; establish a non-formal education system for adolescent boys and girls aged 10-14 years; strengthen and expand the ongoing non-formal education for adults (15+ years); and provide for continuing education for neo-literates (Ahmed and Wahab, 1997:208-212).

5.6. Primary and Mass Education Scenarios

In India the total literacy has been targeted by the year 2005, and keeping this point in view the country has given much importance on Primary and Mass Education Programmes. In accordance with the national target, the State Government of West Bengal too, has made befitting steps on this sector. For instance, the number of primary schools in this State has been risen from 50,827 in 1988-89 (The Statesman Yearbook 1993-94:762) to 55,171 in 1998-99 (Monorama Yearbook 2001). Thus 4344 new Primary Schools have been set up in the State of West Bengal at the previous decade. In consequence of the enhancement of primary schools' volume, satisfactory progressions over the recent years in respect of Gross Enrolment Ratio at primary stage as well as overall literacy growth have been recorded by this State.

West Bengal achieved 98 per cent of GER at primary stage in 1992-93 (Human Development in South Asia 1998:49) which has been progressed to 103.6 per cent in 1996-97 (GOI, 1998:144). Similarly, the rate of literacy in West Bengal was recorded 57.7 per cent (67.81 for male and 46.56 per cent for female) in the Census Report of 1991. But the survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization in December 1997 reveals that the said rate has been risen to 72 per cent (81 per cent for male and 63 per cent for female). Thus the overall literacy rate progressed 14.30 per cent within a period of 6 years from 1991 to 1997. It is of contextual note that in West Bengal, the rate of literacy for the population relating to the age group 7 years and above was advanced only 9.05 per cent during the consequent decade of 1981 to 1991 (GOWB, 1999:6). So, the annual progression in the rate of literacy for recent years is 2.6 times higher than that of the previous decade.

In West Bengal various programmes for eradication of illiteracy were attempted since long past. But the literacy schemes that were in operation before 1990 could not make much headway towards elimination of illiteracy on account of their inherent weaknesses and limitations. In general, those centre-based schemes had neither any scientific curriculum nor could they involve the local self-governing institutions or the local administration in the literacy programmes. Moreover, the absence of any scientific programme of Post-Literacy and Continuing Education, and above all non-involvement of the common people were other reasons for the failure of these programmes. The State Government, therefore, had been considering for a long time to replace all age-old schemes by a volunteer-based Mass Literacy Programme. Because the State Government of West Bengal has rightly felt that a full-fledged, time-bound and area-specific programme with active participation of all peoples from different strata of the society are very much essential for a successful Literacy Programme (GOWB, 1999:24).

Later on, as a major step towards translating the new idea into action, the State Government of West Bengal in 1988 created the Mass Education Extension Department. The National Literacy Mission (NLM) was also set up during the same year specially to impart functional literacy to adult illiterate persons in the age group 15-35. Keeping in mind the alarming increase in the number of non-literates in the State, NLM replaced the Centre-Based Project by its new Campaign-Based Programme. As per the NLM norms, successful learners are expected to make simple sentences with conjunct letters, read and comprehend small passages; write small letters; compute simple problems that involve addition, subtraction, multiplication and division (GOWB, 1999:24).

In Bangladesh vast importance has been laid on primary and mass education. A Children Education and Literacy Survey conducted by Primary and Mass Education Division and later on validated by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 1997 reveals that after 1991 primary school enrolment ratios as well as adult literacy rates for both males and females took a noticeable turn upwards. As a result, Bangladesh achieved the national goals of 95 per cent gross enrolment in primary education and 62 percent adult literacy by the year 2000. In 1997, the gross enrolment in primary schools was 93 per cent while the adult literacy rate was 51.2 per cent. Compared with 1991 benchmark, the 1997 achievement on enrolment marked a growth of 18 per cent, while in adult literacy the growth is 16 per cent. Thus the average annual growth rates of gross enrolment in primary school and in adult literacy during the period of 1991 to 1997 stood at 3 per cent and 2.7 per cent respectively. The 1997 survey also disclosed girls' enrolment rate in primary schools to be 87 per cent. Compared to the corresponding figure of 70 per cent in 1991, it marked 17 per cent increase with an average annual growth rate of 2.8 per cent (Adopted from DNFE, Feb.1999:26).

It is contextually relevant to note that the Government of Bangladesh has involved almost all the privately and externally financed leading NGOs and community organizations in national literacy campaign for wider and more effective NFE coverage. The NGOs are working under an NGO consortium entitled Bangladesh Council for Mass Education (BCoME) to implement programmes at the field level. In 1998, a total of 3.3 million learners were graduated from DNFE literacy courses. Another 5.6 million are undergoing courses now. DNFE report discloses that Bangladesh has made 4 Districts and 18 Upazilas illiteracy-free up to February 1999.

The gross calculation on the number of graduates of 2000 strongly indicates that at the end of the year 2000 adult literacy rate has exceeded 62 per cent. The current situation and growing demand of literacy lead to a strong possibility that after completion of NFE projects by 2001, adult literacy rate in Bangladesh would be around 80 per cent. However, Bangladesh is now undergoing the Fifth Five Year Plan of Development (1997-2002). This plan has made highest sectoral allocation of public expenditure for education. From the plan projection it is known that an allocation of Tk.16,000 million has been made for revenue expenditure of education sector while an amount of Tk.128,931 million has been dispensed for its development expenditure. Thus at national level 20.5 per cent of revenue budget and 15 per cent of development budget have been provided for education sector. The most important feature of the said plan of development is that it has imparted maximum priority on primary education as 64.3 per cent of development expenditure of education sector has been fixed for it (adopted from Muhith, 1999:145).

In addition there are sectoral and sub-sectoral plan experiences of setting objectives, identifying strategies, allocating resources, monitoring and evaluating performances and achieving objectives. Working through these plans, Bangladesh has gradually advanced towards the current state of literacy. The whole gamut of NFE activities has turned into a silent revolution over the last few years. The commitment and enthusiasm of people will contribute to the successful accomplishment of the ongoing revolution through establishing a truly empowered learning society to meet the challenges of the 21st century with courage, dignity, fortitude and democratic values (DNFE, February 1999:28).

5.7. *Some Special Programmes for Education*

The State Government of West Bengal has taken various initiatives in accordance with the central direction to actualize the obligation of providing elementary education to entire population within the shortest possible period. Concerted efforts have been made to achieve the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education. As a result, the literacy campaign spread all over the eighteen districts of the State has taken the shape of mass movement during the last nine years. The major steps for attaining literacy achievement in this State are included with TLCs, PLCs, CEP etc. Apart from these programmes the State Government has been implementing some special types of programmes since the last few years. The worth mentioning programmes are:

- (a) Programmes of WBSLMA: The West Bengal State Literacy Mission Authority (WBSLMA) was registered on 18th June 1998. Its functions are determination and implementation of policies for literacy, post literacy and continuing education programmes; giving sanctions to project proposals; supervision and monitoring of the programmes and rejuvenation of the literacy movements in the State by expediting its implementation at all levels.
- (b) Adult High School Scheme: This scheme is meant for adult literates who had been forced to discontinue education and are now willing to continue their studies up to Madhyamik level. These Adult High Schools have been registered by the WBBSE and the teachers under this scheme are given minimum honorarium. At present 33 Adult High Schools are running in the State. But emphasis has been given on opening new Adult High Schools all over the State, and specially in the districts where the CEP is ongoing.

- (c) Non-Formal Education Scheme: Through this scheme the boys and girls belonging to the age group 9-14 years who have dropped out or still remain out of school are given the opportunity of alternative schooling. The curriculum of this programme is a part with that of formal Primary Education, and classes are held at places and times convenient to the learners. In West Bengal, many NGOs are involved in implementing this scheme with the financial aid of the Government. At present 10 such NGOs are running non-formal education centres in different districts. Proposals for approval of 46 such projects submitted by several NGOs are now waiting for approval of the Government of India.
- (d) Audio-Visual Education: Audio-Visual wing of the Mass Education Extension Directorate has been performing an important role in promoting literacy and awareness by distributing educational posters, leaflets, and video-cassettes etc throughout the state. Besides arranging film and video shows, this wing has been organizing exhibitions on literacy in different districts of West Bengal. In addition to the A.V. unit of the Directorate, 11 audio-visual units are being run by distinct NGOs in different districts of West Bengal with financial assistance of the State Government.
- (e) Games and Cultural Competitions: In order to promote friendship, brotherhood and encouragement amongst the learners and neo-literates, inter district sports and cultural competitions are organized every year. Since 1996 these competitions are organized not in Calcutta but in different districts under the joint auspices of Mass Education Extension Directorate and the concerned Zilla (District) Saksharata Samity.

- (f) Training and Participation in Fair: In order to co-ordinate efforts of different development departments and voluntary organizations, Directorates of Mass Education Extension along with the State Resource Centre for Adult Education and Bangiyo Saksharata Prasar Samity use to organize workshops and training programmes. The participants in the workshop cum training include representatives from Panchayets, Teacher and Student Organizations, Youth Organizations, Mahila Samities, Farmers' and Labour Organisations.
- (g) Books for Neo-literates: A state level committee for selection of books for neo-literates have till date approved about 350 titles in Bengali, Hindi and Urdu which are suitable for neo-literates. Moreover, steps are being taken to make a fresh selection of books in order to prepare a new list of approved books.
- (h) Library facilities for the Neo-literates: Libraries play an important role in developing the reading habit among neo-literates and also in strengthening their acquired knowledge. Therefore, arrangements have been made to open a special section for the neo-literates in each of the 341 Rural Libraries in the State.
- (j) Janashiksha Prasar Bhawan: To consolidate the basic literacy achieved by neo-literates, a scheme is already experimentally underway to establish 18 Janashiksha Prasar Bhawans in different districts. The main objective of this project is to educate the neo-literates and semi-literates of the locality, and help them find the means of a better and quality life. To satisfy the needs of each and every neo-literate of the locality, these centres will be converted into focal points for human resource development in future.

In accordance with the growing importance of education, the constitution of Bangladesh has made it obligatory for the government to educate its entire population at least up to the elementary level. The country as a signatory to the Declaration at the World Summit on 'Education For All' held in Jomtein, Thailand in March 1990, is promised to ensure a satisfactory literacy standard among its vast population. Government of Bangladesh in pursuance of its constitutional obligations and commitments made in international forums has been implementing some special types of programmes since the last few years. The worth mentioning programmes are:

- (a) Free Primer Distribution: Government of Bangladesh in order to ensure compulsory primary education has introduced 'Free Primer Distribution' all over the country. In addition to such distribution, the government used to assist those NGOs who are involved in literacy activities by providing them free manuals and training packages.
- (b) Satellite Schools: In recent years a large number of Satellite Schools have been established countrywide by the government with a view to bringing the schools to the students who cannot travel to the main school. Female teachers who are selected locally through the managing committee but paid by the government manage these schools. These schools use to send the students to main schools after completing literacy grade-II.
- (c) Community Schools: Government has introduced Community schools in the areas with no school. These low cost schools are of primary standard and are constructed on the lands donated by the local people. In addition to construction costs of such schools, government pays the allowances that partially meet the teachers' salaries.

- (d) Food for Education Programme: To bring the children of poor and distressed families under the umbrella of Compulsory Primary Education Campaign, the Government has launched 'Food for Education Programme'. 15 kg of wheat or 12 kg of rice for one school going child, or 20 Kg wheat or 16 kg of rice for more than one school going child are given per month to each eligible poor family under this programme. Though the programme was initially introduced in 460 backward Unions under 460 Upazilas in 1993-94 fiscal year, the government being encouraged by programme's success has expanded it to 1243 Unions by 1996-97 with priority given to economically backward areas. Bangladesh Economic Review 1999 has disclosed that 2.3 million students covering 2.2 million families and 17,403 schools have been benefited in 1998-99 fiscal year by this programme.
- (e) School Attractiveness Programme: This programme has been started under the General Education Project aiming at making the students eager to go to school and providing the schools with congenial atmosphere through friendly student relationship. A feature of this programme is to provide poor students, particularly females, with school uniforms, educational materials, sports equipment and occasionally nutritive food. About 700,000 children from 689 schools have been benefited under this programme.
- (f) Tuition Fees Exemption Programme: A special programme for the exemption of tuition fees for the girl students studying at secondary schools outside the municipal areas has been adopted by the Government of Bangladesh since 1990. Further, the government has made a provision that one girl child of any parent will be given the opportunity to study up to degree level free of cost.

- (g) Girls' Stipend Programme: Beside the exemption of the girl students' tuition fees, a nationwide programme for providing them with stipend is being administered by the government since January 1994. The beneficiaries of this programme are the girls of grades 6-10 who are studying in recognized secondary schools or madrasahs situated outside the metropolitan areas. Initially all unmarried girls of this category admitted within 31st January each year are eligible to get the benefits. But continuation of the stipends depend on girls' parents agreeing that their daughters will: (a) attend school for at least 75 per cent of the school days; (b) obtain minimum 45 per cent marks on an average in annual examinations; (c) remain unmarried until the completion of the SSC Examination. The main objective of this programme is to stir up a striking increase of girls' enrolment in secondary schools and thereby enlarging the stock of educated women capable of participating in economic and social development of the country. The programme is also intended to prevent early marriage of girls, promote supportive community climate for girls' education and provide occupational skill training to school-leaving girls interested in entering the labour market. Following an uniform principle this programme is being executed in 460 Upazilas by 4 different projects, viz Female Secondary School Assistant Project (FSSAP), Female Secondary Students' Stipend Project (FSSP), Secondary School Development Project (SEDP) and Female Secondary School Education Stipend Project (FSSESP). It is relevant to note that due to these projects a large-scale positive change in girls' enrolment at secondary level has already been established.

5.8. Major Successes and Failures

As the Government of West Bengal has taken a lot of steps in introducing a positive trend of educational growth among its people, the following successes are being perceived here since its inception as a State under Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic of India:

- (a) According to 1991 Census, the rates of literacy in West Bengal for population relating to age group 7⁺ years are 67.81 per cent for male, 46.56 per cent for female and 57.70 per cent for the both sexes which are respectively 3.68 per cent, 7.27 per cent and 5.49 per cent higher than Indian figure.
- (b) In this State adult literacy rates have been progressed very rapidly over the recent years and reached to 81 per cent for male, 63 per cent for female and 72 per cent for both the sexes as per survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization in December 1997.
- (c) In comparison with 1961 benchmark, the rate of male literacy has become double (from 40.08 per cent to 81 per cent) in 1997 (GOWB, 1999:6).
- (d) In comparison with 1961 benchmark, the rate of female literacy has become nearly redouble (from 16.98 per cent to 63 per cent) in 1997 (GOWB, 1999:6).
- (e) In comparison with 1961 benchmark, the rate of total literacy has increased about two and a half times (from 29.28 per cent to 72 per cent) in 1997 (GOWB, 1999:6).
- (f) Number of primary schools in this State has been risen from 50,827 in 1988-89 (Statesman Yearbook 1993-94:762) to 55,171 in 1998-99 (Monorama Yearbook 2001:133).
- (g) Gross enrolment ratio at primary level increased from 98 per cent in 1992-93 (Human Development in South Asia 1998:49) to 103.6 per cent in 1996-97 (GOI, 1998:144).

- (h) During the period 1990 to 1999 the literacy campaign has spread over all the districts of the State and has taken the shape of a mass movement (GOWB, 1999:29).
- (i) Out of 18 districts of the State, 13 districts have already been covered with the programmes of PLCs up to 1999 (Monorama Yearbook 2001:132).
- (j) About 7.93 million non-literates of 14 districts have achieved the NLM norms of literacy through partial or final external evaluation to become neo-literates up to 1999 (GOWB, 1999:29).
- (k) It is expected that all the districts of West Bengal will come under Continuing Education Programme by 2001 (GOWB, 1999:29).
- (l) The State Government is at present spending Rs.273 crore per month for the teachers and teaching staff of secondary level which seems to be highest among the States of India (Uttar Banga Sangbad, 30.12.2000).
- (m) In the 2000-2001 fiscal year, 1100 Junior Secondary Schools have been upgraded as Secondary Schools and 469 Secondary Schools have been turned to Higher Secondary Schools (Uttar Banga Sangbad, 30.12.2000).
- (n) The number of Degree (B.A./B.Sc./B.Com) Colleges was 307 in 1992-93 (Statistical Abstract of West Bengal 1994-95:109) which has been increased to 360 (37 Government and 323 Non-Government) in 1999-2000 (Annual Report of the Department of Higher Education, Vol.II, 1999-2000:1).
- (o) A total number of 612,744 students were found studying in 330 Degree Colleges and 9 Universities in 1999-2000 where the share of female students was 40.56 per cent (calculated from Annual Report of the Department of Higher Education, Vol.II, 1999-2000:4).

Despite the above mentioned significant achievements, the following defeats may be pointed out for West Bengal in respect of her overall educational growth:

- (a) According to 1991 Census, 23.91 million population of West Bengal relating to age group 7+ years (comprising 9.54 million males and 14.37 million females) were illiterate. Thus about half of the rural population (49.5 per cent) and one fourth of the urban population (24.73 per cent) of the said age group belonged to illiterate category (GOWB, 1999:6).
- (b) During independence, the position of West Bengal among the States and Union Territories of India in respect of literacy rate was the second (Uttar Banga Sangbad, 30.12.2000) which deteriorated over the decades and come down to the eighteenth position as per 1991 Census.
- (c) As per survey conducted by the National Sample Survey Organization in December 1997, the rate of literacy in West Bengal is 63 per cent for female against 81 per cent for male (GOWB, 1999:6). Thus there lies a disappointing 18 per cent male-female literacy gap.
- (d) Through national literacy movement up to 1999, a total number of 7.91 million illiterates of West Bengal have been turned into neo-literates against the target of 14.46 million. Thus only 54.7 per cent of the target is achieved in this State (Monorama Yearbook 2001:133).
- (e) As per 1991 Census, Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes attained the literacy rates of 42.21 per cent and 27.78 per cent respectively. There is no national statistics for the Muslims; yet it is assumed from different studies that the Muslims are as SC and ST lagging much behind in literacy status as compared with State Level.

On the other end, being committed to provide basic education to all citizens, the Government of Bangladesh enacted Compulsory Primary Education Act in 1990 and made it effective since 1993. In addition to implementing a Plan of Action for EFA goals, the government has taken various measures to ensure satisfactory educational growth at all other levels. As a result, Bangladesh has succeeded in introducing a significant trend of educational growth at different levels among its people over the years. The major successes are:

- (a) Adult literacy rates have been reached to 59.4 per cent for male, 42.2 per cent for female and 51.2 per cent for both the sexes in 1997 marking a growth of 15.1 per cent for male, 16.4 per cent for female and 15.9 per cent for person in comparison with 1991 benchmark.
- (b) About 8000 primary schools, 2792 secondary schools, 666 higher secondary colleges, 98 degree colleges and 1091 madrasahs have been established during the period 1994 to 1998. Moreover, an open university and 16 private universities have been established up to 1996/97 while the government has taken a programme for establishing 12 universities for science and technology in the current 5-Year Plan (Bangladesh Economic Review 1998:69).
- (c) A programme for improvement of training facilities as well as direct training provisions has been undertaken for improving the efficiency and levels of teaching of the teachers of secondary schools and madrasahs. 4 new Teachers' Training Colleges in addition to existing 11 colleges for secondary level, 5 Higher Secondary Teachers' Training Institutes and 1 Teachers' Training Institute for madrasahs have been established under this programme (Bangladesh Economic Review 1998:69).

- (d) Education expenditure as a share of total government expenditure has increased from 9.4 per cent during the First Five Year Plan (1973-78) to 13.6 per cent during the Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-95), to 15.4 per cent in 1996-97 (Human Development in South Asia 1998:57).
- (e) During the period 1991-1999 Public Current Expenditure on Education Sector has been increased from Tk.14,944.2 million to Tk.46,338.9 million and for Primary Education it has been risen from Tk.7,324.1 million to Tk.20,168.5 million (GOB, Statistical Summary, December 1999:99).
- (f) The budgetary allocation for Primary and Mass Education on an average was about 50 per cent of the total education sector budget since 1990 which during the current plan period (1997-2002) has been increased to about 65 per cent and thus stood highest in South Asian Region (Human Development in South Asia 1998:57).
- (g) During the period 1991-1998 the ratios of net enrolment and gross enrolment at primary level increased 22 per cent and 20 per cent and reached at 82 per cent and 96 per cent respectively (PMED, EFA 2000 Assessment Preliminary Report, May 1999).
- (h) All levels combined gross enrolment ratio has been increased from 30 per cent in 1980 to 39 per cent in 1994 (Human Development in South Asia 1998:57).
- (i) During the period 1974-1997, the rate of literacy for the population of 5⁺ years progressed from 24 per cent to 45 per cent (WFW, 1995:40).
- (j) Bangladesh has exceeded the target of Gross Enrolment Ratio of 95 per cent with Completion Rate of 70 per cent and Adult Literacy Rate of 62 per cent by the year 2000, which were 76 per cent, 40 per cent and 35 per cent in 1991 respectively (DNFE Diary, 2000).

- (k) Shares of girls among the total students at primary, secondary, and college levels over the recent years grew at a faster rate and in 1997 progressed to 48.09 per cent, 47.70 per cent and 33.33 per cent against the 1985's shares of 40.47 per cent, 32.56 per cent and 19.04 per cent respectively (Collected from BANBEIS).
- (l) Besides the official data from government sources, a sample household survey conducted in 1998 under the auspices of CAMPE found 109 per cent gross enrolment ratio at primary schools for the girls against 104 per cent for the boys. Similarly the survey disclosed a slightly higher net enrolment ratio of 78.6 per cent for the girls against 75.5 per cent for the boys (Chowdhury, A.M.R. et al ed., 1999:2-3).
- (m) The ratio of male and female teachers' at primary level progressed from 91:9 in 1981 to 69:31 in 1998 (WFW, 1995:42; Bangladesh Economic Review 1999:85).
- (n) Up to 1998 more than 50 per cent secondary schools got electricity while 80 per cent co-educational secondary schools have been provided with separate toilet facilities (Human Development in South Asia 1998:57).
- (o) Secondary School Certificate Vocational Programmes have been started since 1995 in 64 institutions to integrate vocational education that has included 15 engineering trades (Human Development in South Asia 1998:57).

Despite the above achievements, Bangladesh's education challenge remains formidable and the following defeats may be pointed out in respect of her overall educational growth:

- (a) Enrolment in technical education as a per cent of total secondary enrolment is very poor (0.7 per cent only) which accounts less than one-half of the South Asian average (Human Development in South Asia 1998:57).

- (b) The public expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP has climbed to 2.3 per cent in 1993-4, from 1.2 per cent during the First Plan period. But it is far behind from the developing countries as well as South Asian Region, the average of which was 3.6 per cent in 1993-4 (Human Development in South Asia 1998:58).
- (c) About 3.4 million children of age group 6-10 were found outside schools in 1997 (Statistical Summary 1999).
- (d) Teacher-pupil ratio at primary level was progressed to 1:54 in 1995 from 1:61 in 1990, but again regressed to 1:57 in 1997 which is far below from the expected level (EFA 2000 Assessment Preliminary Report, May 1999).
- (e) Female teachers' as a percentage of total teachers is very poor as it stands only 27 in 1995. Further only 10 per cent females are engaged in teaching at secondary level since 1970 which is one-fourth of the average of the developing countries (Haq and Haq, 1998:57).
- (f) Combined enrolment at tertiary level is 4 per cent which is very poor. For women the situation is more alarming as the men-women ratio at this level was found 78:22 in 1995 (BANBEIS; Haq and Haq, 1998:57).
- (g) At the higher level educational institutions, terrorism has become a post-liberation phenomenon. The situation is of course a serious impediment to higher education and research. Teachers by and large are also involved in students' politics and its victims are merit, discipline and efficiency (Muhith, 1999:158-159).
- (h) Research is still a very neglected area in Bangladesh. There is a large number of research institutes in the public sector but the programmes are poor and experts mostly are of low quality. In the private sector there is practically no research activity (Muhith, 1999:162).

5.9. Observations

West Bengal and Bangladesh were under the province of Bengal up to the end of colonial British rule but presently the first one is a State of India and the second one is an independent country. Both the areas are densely populated and characterized by dominant agrarian economy and also deeply related with each other for strong lingual bond and a close cultural affinity.

The basic difference between the two regions is that the Muslims are considered as the largest minority in West Bengal while they form absolute majority in Bangladesh. These regions possessed rich literacy heritage as different authorities attempted there various programmes for eradication of illiteracy since long past. However, a bill making primary education compulsory in the municipal areas of Bengal was passed in 1919. Later on, with the provision of limited autonomy in the Indian Book Act of 1921, Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act was passed in 1930.

However, the Government of Independent India showed keen interest on mass education by making constitutional provision. But it's an interesting note that education was exclusively the responsibility of the States. Due to constitutional amendment in 1976, education has been transformed as the joint responsibility of the Centre and the concerned State. As a result, plan outlay on education for West Bengal increased from Rs. 153 crore in the First Five Year Plan to Rs. 19,600 crore in the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97). The expenditure on education as per cent of GDP also rose from 0.7 per cent in 1951-52 to 3.3 per cent in 1995-96. The Central Plan outlay for education has been increased from Rs. 1,825 crore in 1995-96 to Rs. 3,383 crore in 1997-98.

The government of Bangladesh has presented an admirable Constitution that imposed the provisions in favour of a uniform, mass-oriental and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children and removing illiteracy within the shortest possible time. Accordingly, an Education Reform Commission was set up in Bangladesh in 1972 under the chairmanship of Dr. Qudrat-E-Khuda. The Commission submitted its report in 1974 where the main objectives of education were outlined from the view points of moral, economic and national obligations of the learners. The Commission imparted top priority on primary education and placed lot of suggestions for its development.

The existing system of education in West Bengal seems much agreeable with Central Policy. Yet, it is almost similar to that of Bangladesh. Broadly, the systems of education in West Bengal are constituted with three learning levels, viz elementary, secondary and higher education while we find that the prominent levels of education in Bangladesh are primary, secondary and higher. However, parallel to the general system, a traditional system of Madrasha Education is found common in both the areas. Another interesting similarity lies in primary education that has been declared compulsory in both the areas but not implemented anywhere.

Moreover, in recent times, Non-Formal Education (NFE) has emerged as a distinct and complementary system to the formal sub-sector of education in both the regions enlisting commitments and endeavours of the government and a number of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). It is because the governments of India as well as Bangladesh are committed to achieve the goals of EFA within the shortest possible time.

Government of India in 1968 adopted a National Policy on Education that has been revised latest by 1992. The State Government of West Bengal, in accordance with the education policies adopted by the Central Government of India, has taken few educational programmes. Among those programmes Universalization of Elementary Education has received the highest attention.

Similarly the Government of Bangladesh has declared the aim to eradicate illiteracy within 10 years and has formulated the education policy to this end. The Government of Bangladesh have been very sincerely striving to encourage full participation of children of Grades I and II especially in the remote and rural areas. Moreover, 'Food for Education' programme has been introduced at primary level to bring the children of poor and distressed families under the umbrella of 'Compulsory Primary Education'.

India has set an ambitious target of attaining complete literacy by the year 2005. Following the central policies and directions, the State Government of West Bengal has also paid much importance on Operation Blackboard and Total Literacy Campaign to achieve the EFA goals. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh too enjoins upon the state to eradicate illiteracy within a given time. As a result the present government of Bangladesh is committed to achieve total literacy by the year 2006. The Government has already adopted a two pronged policy for universalization of primary education and eradication of illiteracy throughout the country. Specific strategies have been developed to address major identified problems like low-enrolment (particularly of girls), low attendance and high drop-out in the primary school.

The State Government of West Bengal has made befitting steps to ensure total literacy for which the number of primary schools in this State has been risen from 50,827 in 1988-89 to 55,171 in 1998-99. As a positive consequence of it the rate of literacy in West Bengal has been progressed to 81 per cent for male and 63 per cent for female and 72 per cent for persons according to the survey report of the National Sample Survey Organization in December 1997.

Similarly, in Bangladesh vast importance has been laid on primary and mass education. A Children Education and Literacy Survey conducted by Primary and Mass Education Division and later on validated by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 1997 reveals that after 1991 primary school enrolment ratios as well as adult literacy rates for both males and females took a noticeable turn upwards. As a result, Bangladesh achieved the national goals of 95 per cent gross enrolment in primary education and 62 percent adult literacy by the year 2000. Compared with 1991 benchmark, the 1997 achievement on enrolment marked a growth of 18 per cent. The current situation and growing demand of literacy lead to a strong possibility that after completion of NFE projects by 2001, adult literacy rate in Bangladesh would be around 80 per cent.

Despite various initiatives for the growth of education taken by the governments of West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh, a wide range gender-gap is still distinctly evident in both the region. Here we find that the public expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP has increased in the recent years, yet it is far behind from the developing countries as well as South Asian Region.