



About half the world's adult population—over 800 million people—are illiterate and there may well be 200 million more within the next decade. In today's world of mass communication and sophisticated learning techniques the penalty paid by those societies with high rates of illiteracy is significant and growing.

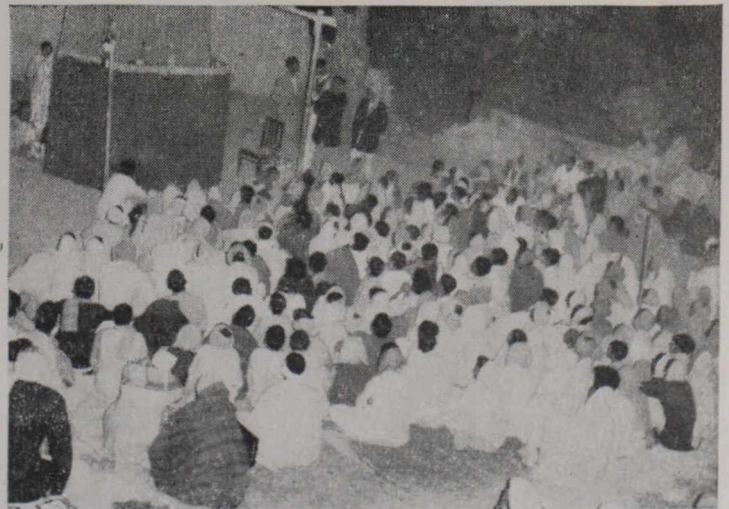
The bulk of the world's illiterate population is found in the developing world where universal education for children is still only a goal, to say nothing of the hundreds of millions of adults whose productivity is reduced because of their inability to read or write. While educational facilities for children in the developing world are growing at a tremendous rate, in many countries the percentage of children in schools is still small and the number of years spent at school are often insufficient to produce permanent literacy. The result is that the number of illiterates is continuing to increase in spite of the growth of the educational opportunities.

**What is literacy?** Educational research indicates that at least four years of primary schooling are needed to develop permanently literate individuals, although additional years may be required where the quality of teaching is poor or individual motivation is lacking. But **permanent literacy** is not the same as **functional literacy**, though

one may follow from the other. If a child has not learned to use and enjoy reading and writing he will quickly lose his ability. Thus if literacy is not functional, it will not be permanent. To be permanently literate a person must learn to read and write in the language of his community, have ready access to the written word, be literate in the vocabulary of his employment, and live in a situation where being literate brings respect and advancement. A functionally literate person not only understands the tools of literacy, but can use them to improve his life.

Increasing attention and concern is being focussed on functional literacy and its role in social and economic development. Traditionally, illiteracy has been eliminated by extending academic education. However, this approach has now been recognized as inadequate; despite the rise in percentages of literacy, the absolute number of illiterates is growing because the population is increasing faster than the growth of educational facilities. Even those who become literate do not always remain so due to the failure to link literacy to the activities of daily life.

Literacy is not just an educational problem. It forms an integral part of the total problem of equitable economic and social development. Literacy, as a means to an end and not an end in itself, must encompass more than the teaching of reading and writing. It is a tool for improving technical and professional qualifications, for developing a broader outlook and faculties of critical thinking, for stimulating participation in the



Puppet show at Barauli Khalilabad organized by Literacy House, Lucknow.