

TOJDE April 2002 ISSN 1302-6488 Volume:3 Number:2

South & East Asian Adult Education: Chronologies in Commonwealth Countries

**James A. Draper (Eds.) 2001, Universiti Putra Malaysia Press,
pp. 81, ISBN 983-2373-04-2**

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The major aim of this international research project was to record and analyze the chronological development of adult education in the country members of the commonwealth. It traces the developments in the area of adult education since early 1900s to the very latest as for 1999. This project was supported by the Commonwealth of Learning; the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto; the Commonwealth Association for the Education and Training of Adults; and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Education. The editor of this volume and Project Director, Dr. James A. Draper, is a specialist in comparative and international studies, community development, adult literacy and basic education, and cross cultures studies. In the year 2000, the Indian Adult Education Association honored him, for his outstanding contribution to adult education in India, with its Diamond Jubilee Award.

This book is certainly a treasure house of comparative and international information. The editor has very effectively and beautifully presented the richness and diversity of the adult education practices in the South and East Asian Commonwealth countries. There are 54 countries at present in the Commonwealth, falling under five regions: Africa, the Caribbean, South and East Asia, Europe (including Canada) and Asia south Pacific. The idea for such project was initiated in Bangkok in 1990 during the fourth World Assembly of Adult Education, organised by the International council for Adult Education. After further deliberations, country coordinators were identified to record the development of the country-specific history/ chronology, to understand the role of government/NGOs, trade unions, religious group, women's group and others. As a matter of starting point, 'adult education' was broadly defined. Draper in his introductory chapter, "Looking back: Acquiring a Historical Perspective" supports the understanding of historical perspective as a means of expanding our identity. It lets us access changes that have occurred, to find meaning in the present and to be ready for the future.

To make acquaint the reader with understanding and appreciation of the history of adult education terms like Learning, Education, Adult Education, Formal Education and Non-Formal Education have been defined, reflecting the general international usage. The editor of this volume has put a word of caution to the reader to not to treat it as a complete documentation of adult education activities in a specific country. The readers are invited to discuss the chronology of their countries and to add to what has been presented under this project.

This project reports the chronologies for Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka only. The book is organized under two heads: part I for country chronologies and part-II for a selected regional chronology.

Bangladesh, although got independence in 1971, the report of the Commission on Indian Education (Hunter Commission) way back in 1882 deliberated some issues on provision of night school for the education of adult illiterates. After the East Pakistan became the

sovereign state of Bangladesh in 1971, the Bangladesh Bayesko Shakkharata Sangshad (Bangladesh Adult Literacy Association) initiated a campaign for adult literacy from a remote village. The role of Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (1973), Community Development Council (1976), and the National Council of Churches (1978) has been recorded. In 1979 the interim education policy of the Bangladesh Government laid stress on total literacy programmes. The chronology also enlists the world famous experiment of Grammen Bank (the largest credit organization for rural poor in Bangladesh) under the sponsorship of UNESCO.

For the chronology on Brunei Darussalam, Abu Bakar B. Oksd Haji Mohd. Salled, reports that although Brunei Darussalam got independent in 1984, it became a protectorate state in 1906 through its treaty with Britain. In 1914 the Government introduced a small secular orientated Malay School to cater to educational needs of 40 male students. In 1952, the Brunei Govt. introduced an educational Enactment Act wherein all private schools were required to be registered with state education officers. For the first time (in 1958) adult literacy education was introduced for whole of the country by the Brunei Govt. Later on, after independence, a Vocational Programme Development Centre was set up in 1989 by the Ministry of Education and in 1993 the Department. of Technical Education was established within the Ministry of Education. Then in 1998 the Department of Technical Education was reorganized in 4 main divisions: VTE institutions, professional services, education & training, and research.

C.C. Wan and Frances F.F Law has prepared the chronology for Hong Kong. Hong Kong was reverted to the People's Republic of China on July1, 1997. The authors report that in 1902 Hong Kong YMCA was established with a "Chinese Department" and a "European Department." to offer Bible classes, moral education, and teacher training. It is evident from the profile that YMCA and YWCA (which established the first evening school for women in 1925) have great role in adult education in Hong Kong. The services provided by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Open Learning Institute (which became the Open University of Hong Kong in 1997) has been effectively recorded.

S.Y. Shah has documented the chronology for adult education in India. He noted that in 1912 in the pre-independent India, the then Dewan of the Princely State of Mysore (South India) established night schools for illiterate adults and a magazine Vigyan (Science) to make people aware of scientific knowledge. The contribution of nationalist's leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak is also acknowledged. In 1937, Indian Adult Education Society was set up and in 1939 Indian Adult Education Association (IAEA) was constituted as a NGO for promoting adult literacy in India. After independence, a Department of Social Education was set up in 1948 under the Ministry of Education to formulate policies on adult education. Institution of the Nehru Literacy Award by IAEA in 1968, setting up of Directorate of Adult Education by the Govt. of India in 1971, and launching of National Adult Education Programme in 1978 are note worthy. Another milestone is the establishment of National Open School in 1989 by the Govt. to provide vocational education at the secondary & higher secondary level through distance learning system.

Next country profile is on Malaysia by Rahim M. Sail. He traces the mode of adult education in Malaysia way back in 1900 when classes on 'Martial Arts' (or "Silat") were conducted to prepare youth in the art of self-defence. Traditional rural religious schools were opened in 1930. In 1948 the Malayan Adult Education Association (MAEA) was established. The author point out that at the time of independence in 1957, nearly half of the total adult population of Malaysia was illiterate, and thus a special Task Force was set up in 1959. The year 1966 was very important as Malaysia celebrated World Literacy Day. In the year 1968, a "15 years literacy programme" was launched by the Govt.

Tahera Aftab, on chronology in Pakistan, reports of first education conference in 1947 where mass illiteracy was examined, and in 1948 the first National Development Board was

established to implement development schemes in the private sector. She reported that in 1951 total literacy rate of Pakistan was 13.8 percent and a six year National Plan for Educational Development (1951-57) was launched. Later on the first Five Year Plan (1955-60) was promulgated in 1955 with a greater stress on primary education for children. (Strangely there was no mention of adult education in this plan). It was in 1960 when the report of the Commission on National Education was approved, but due to countrywide students' agitation, this report was not implemented. Then in 1969 the National Commission on Manpower and Education was set up, but it was also disbanded. '70s was a better period, the formation of Adult Basic Education Society (1971), New Education Policy (1972), establishment of Allama Iqbal Open University (1975) and Mosque School Project (1978) are note worthy. The Pakistan Govt. launched a National Literacy Plan in 1984 to make 2.2 million adults literate in two years (1984-86) duration through its 25,610 literacy centers. The Adult Basic Education Society won the UNESCO's International Literacy Award to the second time in 1991. The Govt. prepared an Education Policy for 1998-2010, with long-term objectives of achieving literacy, in 1998.

Hoy Pick Lim introduces Singapore by explaining its interesting history of how the European countries started trade in the region and how Singapore came into existence in early 1800s. Lim reports the establishment of University of Singapore in 1949 (modeled upon Oxford and Cambridge, with English of main medium of instructions). Late on in 1955, a second institution of high education, the Nanyang University, was established collectively by the Chinese community in the Southeast Asia (with Chinese as the medium of institutions). An Adult Education Board was set up in 1959 to provide adult education in the country through a wide range of Language and Cultural courses, radio programmes in basic economics, sociology and psychology etc. A Department of Extra Mural Studies was established by the University of Singapore in 1964 (prior to independence in 1965), to promote liberal studies. In 1980 the National University of Singapore came into existence by the merger of University of Singapore and the Nanyang University, to cater to educational needs of multi-social society. The significant role in promoting adult education by the Singapore Association for Continuing Education has also been presented by the author (who has been its President also).

The status of adult education in Sri Lanka is reported by George Mendis, (he became Chairman of the Education Service Board of the Public Service Commission of Sri Lanka). He dates adult education back to 1906, when the Colonial Govt. of Ceylon (old name of Sri Lanka) appointed a special committee for the education of adults. The establishment of Law College in 1910 to provide professional education in law, gave a boost to adult education in the country. It was followed by setting up of a University College in 1921 to provide London University Degrees (this University College later on was upgraded to University of Ceylon in 1942). The Education Reforms Committee of 1943 headed by Minister of Education geared up the delivery of non-formal education courses to adult in rural and sub-urban areas. A year after independence, in 1949, a mobile audio-visual division was established in the Education Department to boost this task. 1970s was a progressive period for Sri Lanka, like establishment of National Apprentice Board (1971) to conduct non-formal education classes in vocational subjects, Sri Lanka Institute of Cooperative Management (1973) to provide training in cooperative enterprises, Sri Lanka Foundation Institute (1973) to act as a resource center for adult education programmes, National Institute of Business Management (1977) and Open University (1980) are important to mention. The situation of adult education was improved further when the headquarters of the Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education was shifted from Australia to Colombo in 1985 and establishment of a National Institute of Education (1986) to undertake research studies in non-formal education. In 1996, the Ministry of Labour organized a national convention on vocational training.

In the last chapter of part-I the editor has made some observations on the status, practices and growth of adult education inter-alia before and after independence in various countries under study.

Part II deals with regional chronology presented by Om Shrivastava, whom I met at his Astha Training Centre at Udaipur (Rajasthan) in 1998 when IGNOU launched a Certificate Programme in Participatory Planning. There we had a good exchange of views on the issues of adult education in the region. He has provided an excellent account of how the commonwealth nations have been active in providing learning opportunities to its citizen through diverse delivery mechanism of using radio, TV, and distance learning programme.

Overall I find this document a valuable source and recommended and a rich resource of historical information to all those interested and involved in theory, practice and research in adult education. This is a book that gives a detailed account of how and when various committees and organizations came up, ways in which learning opportunities were organized; and what was the state of affairs.

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