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VP News

Inside

VIPNET STRENGTHENS ITS ROOTS IN RURAL BIHAR & BENGAL

In the second fortnight of March 2001 two major workshops were organised by Vigyan Prasar for the benefit of rural science clubs of Bihar and West Bengal.

Workshop at Barauni

The Bihar workshop was held in the Barauni Refinery DAV (BRDAV) School at the Indian Oil Corporation (Barauni) complex. Shri Arup Kr. Misra (VP), Shri B. K. Tyagi (NCSTC), Md. Jawaid Alam and Shri M.M. Prasad were the resource persons for the workshop. Sixty participants from 26 science clubs of North Bihar and ten invitees from Jharkand and South Bihar attended the workshop.

The Bihar workshop started on 23 March 2001 with an inauguration function, which was graced by Shri K.P. Sahi, Executive Director of IOC as the Chief Guest. An innovative and interesting Science Exhibition was put up by the students of BRDAV School. The first session began with a slide show. A detailed explanation of salient features useful for established and prospective clubs/NGOs etc., was made by Shri A. K. Misra. Shri B. K. Tyagi (NCSTC) introduced the NCSTC training modules. In the post lunch session the participants were divided into three groups of 20 each and were exposed to Nature Assessment and Study by Shri Tyagi, Ham radio by Shri M. M. Prasad and Hydroponics (soil-less plantation only in water or pebbles or sand) by Md. Jawaid Alam.

Prof. V.S. Ramamurthy, Secretary, DST and Chairman, Governing Body, Vigyan Prasar, handing over the FIE Foundation National Award 2000 to Dr. Subodh Mahanti of Vigyan Prasar at Technology Bhawan. Dr. Mahanti was given the Award for his contribution in the field of Science Popularisation. The function was originally scheduled to be held at Ichalkaranji (Maharashtra). However, due to the devastating earthquake in Gujarat, the organisers decided not to hold the function. Also seen in the picture (L to R) Shri D.D. Deshpande, Hon. Secy. FIE Foundation and Dr. V.B. Kamble, Acting Director, Vigyan Prasar.

The second day (24 March 2001) started with a general discussion on the types of activities suitable for clubs and resources (material and intellectual) required for these activities. This was followed by a demonstration of some peculiar soil-less culture/plants by Md. Alam, which evoked a lot of interest. After this Shri M.M. Prasad took a brief session on how to get started in HAM as a hobby. The post lunch session was a feedback session.

The highlight of the workshop was the live Ham Radio demonstration wherein the participants got the experience to communicate with the NCSTC Ham station in the premises of DST, New Delhi operated by Shri Sandeep Baruah.

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... think scientifically, act scientifically ... think scientifically, act scientifically ... think scientifically, act...

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Literacy Campaigns – A Decade Later

Just over a year ago, we celebrated the birth of *Astha*, the billionth baby of the country. Ever Since, we have added another 27 million babies taking the population of the country to 1.027 billion. In the year 1991, our population stood at 866 million, however, there has been an addition of 161 million persons during the decade 1991-2001. The annual growth rate still hovers around 2 per cent. But, every cloud has a silver lining. There is something to cheer about, as the provisional results of the census of India 2001 indicate. Today 65 per cent of country's citizens can read and write, compared to 52 per cent in 1991. Nearly 76 per cent of the males and 54 per cent of females are literate today, in 1991 their per centage stood at 64 and 39 respectively. This implies that more than three fourths of the males and more than half of the females can read and write today. What is more, there has been a net decline in the "absolute" number of illiterates during 1991-2001.

Undoubtedly, the spectacular growth in the literacy rates has been a result of the major initiative during the last decade in the area of adult literacy by organisations like the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad and backed by the People's Science Movement. With the setting up of the National Literacy Mission in 1989, and formation of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti by the constituent organisations of People's Science Movement, the effort spread to the entire country in the form of Total Literacy Campaign in various districts. In fact by 1997, the campaign spread to some 400 districts. There is no gainsaying the fact that the literacy growth rate achieved during this period was a direct result of the voluntary and mass involvement of over ten million volunteers.

An important fall out of the literacy campaigns was the demand by parents for the education of their children. The recent efforts of the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy include initiatives like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to provide elementary schooling to all children in the age-group 6-14 years by 2010, extension of the District Primary Education Programme aimed at Universalisation of Primary Education, Education Guarantee schemes for out-of-school children, and the third phase of Lok Jumbish and Shiksha Karmi projects for improving the quality of elementary education. As regards the Adult Education, the National Literacy Mission would be revitalized with an aim to attain full literacy in the age-group 15-35 years by 2005. Further, Continuing Education Centres for life long learning in all villages and more Jan Shikshan Sansthans to promote vocational and skill development programmes for neo-literates are also planned to be set up.

Despite the fact that the above initiatives owe their origin to the Government, to translate them into a concerted effort to accomplish the stated goals of total literacy by 2005, in the age group 15-35 years, it would be necessary to build upon the experience gained in the decade gone by. First and foremost, it would be imperative to ensure that the literacy campaigns essentially maintain the participatory nature of a people's movement, as it did during 1990-2000, with its army of volunteers from various Government/non-Government organisations and motivated individuals, which interacted and maintained a close contact with the beneficiaries. Government and voluntary organisations will need to work hand-in-hand for the purpose. Further, to prevent the skills acquired by the neo-literates from being lost, it is required that the same be utilised to understand and appreciate the issues directly affecting their lives – these may include issues like health, environment, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, appropriate technology, agriculture and so on. In addition, a conscious effort would be needed to inculcate a scientific temper among them. This calls for continuous post-literacy follow-up activities with the neo-literates, and an evaluation of methods, structures and the primers developed till date for suitability and propriety of such materials, and their improvement. Otherwise, there is every likelihood that the neo-literates would lose the skills acquired and fall back into the trap of illiteracy, thereby negating the progress thus far.

What is described above is really a ready-made opportunity for the constituents of the Vigyan Prasar Network (VIPNET) of science clubs to contribute their might and be an integral part of the literacy campaigns and activities like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The clubs could engage themselves in a few of the activities outlined above with the neo-literates. Then our cherished goals of total literacy, inculcation of scientific temper and self-reliance will not look too distant a dream. Please do write to us how we could together contribute to the effort. We still have a long way to go.

❑ **V.B. KAMBLE**

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