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ABSTRACT
                 Despite the extensive work that has been done and continues
to take place in the field of literacy in Nepal, it was not until very
recently that literacy activity in Nepal was reflected in writing.
Increasingly, however, literacy practitioners in Nepal are realizing the
importance of documenting their experiences, and literature devoted to the
following aspects of literacy in Nepal is now available: family literacy,
learner-generated materials, the language experience approach, legal
literacy, and participatory videotape. More than two-thirds of publications
on these topics date from the 1990s. A large amount of those publications
have been produced for or by specific projects, either as evaluation reports
or proposals. Only a few articles examining issues or even the history of
literacy developments in Nepal have been published. Most available literature
on literacy in Nepal has been produced by international agencies for their
own internal use and must therefore be read in the context of planning and
evaluating a specific literacy project or program. The material on literacy
in Nepal that does exist is widely scattered and therefore difficult to
obtain in Nepal or the United Kingdom. Many publications must be requested
from the individual agencies concerned. (Contains 70 references.) (MN)

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LITERACY IN NEPAL :
Looking through the literature

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August 1995

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1. Introduction

Family literacy, learner-generated materials, language-experience approach, legal literacy, participatory video : there is a lot happening in literacy in Nepal, particularly in the field of post-literacy. Ironically - considering this particular development intervention centres on reading and writing - until very recently all this literacy activity was not much reflected in writing. Literacy practitioners in Nepal are however increasingly realising the importance of documenting their experiences, and a look through the current literature will show the richness and diversity of their ideas. It is now a good time to review the literature produced to date as an indication for an international audience of the issues being explored and discussed within literacy programmes in Nepal.

A quick glance through the bibliography of this review should indicate how recent much of this literature is : over two-thirds of the titles date from the 1990s. There is a large amount of material on literacy which has been produced for or by specific projects, either as evaluation reports or proposals. There are by contrast only a few published articles of a more general kind examining issues or even the history of literacy developments in Nepal. Consequently, most of the material reviewed here has been produced by international agencies for their own internal use and needs to be read in the context of planning and evaluating a specific literacy project or programme. The main purpose of this review is to use the literature to point to issues within literacy and post-literacy in Nepal, to 'set the scene', rather than to comment on the quality of the articles and reports themselves. For this reason, I will begin with an overview section which, besides summarising these issues, attempts to show what the literature might not reveal about literacy in Nepal.

2. An Overview

2 i. Setting the scene

It is important to start by pointing out how this literature review is affected by the wider context of the changing political climate in Nepal. Until recent years, there has been a tendency to be protective about project information, to be positive rather than negative in public, and to regard other literacy programmes as competitors rather than potential partners. This at least was my own experience of working in literacy[1] - Seti Project staff were considered rather strange by fieldworkers in other literacy programmes because they publicly criticised some aspects of their 'own' project. Ironically, these criticisms came to be regarded as a sign of the project's 'failure' rather than the success of the first technical advisor to build up a tradition of evaluating and criticising from within (see MOEC, 1990 on "misunderstanding the Seti Project"). The present more open atmosphere and emphasis on sharing ideas and networking is not simply a result of the restoration of democracy in 1990 but of the greater influence of Western-style education and training in Nepal, especially on NGO workers. The traditional model of rote learning in schools did not encourage students to criticise or challenge ideas in the way that is expected in Western donor-supported projects. The great escalation of NGO activity in literacy since 1990 has also had an impact on how and what issues are written and talked about.

Another comment that needs to be made here is regarding the language and cultural bias of the articles and reports that are available. Most of the articles and reports I have reviewed were written in English, primarily for a Western rather than a Nepali audience - the majority being written for donor agencies such as UNICEF or the World Bank. There is thus a tendency to rely on empirical data, to try to quantify successes and present a generally positive image of the project. Perhaps because of this 'one patron' characteristic, there is seldom an attempt to produce reports comparing and contrasting programmes run by different agencies (Shrestha, 1993, and Comings et al, 1992, being notable exceptions).

Any assumption that writing is the most effective way to explore and discuss issues needs to be challenged within the Nepali context. Significantly, several networks and groups have been set up by Nepali NGOs to critically discuss their projects with colleagues : the emphasis is on oral discussion rather than producing written

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[1] I worked as a teacher trainer with the Seti Project in the Far West of Nepal from 1985 - 87.

accounts. The need to communicate these ideas to fieldworkers further afield has however resulted in some newsletters and journals being produced in Nepali. Published by local NGOs, _Sambadak_ and _Bikas_ have become forums for critical analysis of development initiatives and issues within Nepal. Both these publications see a need to include translations into Nepali of articles by major writers in English (e.g. Freire in _Sambadak_, David Korten in _Bikas_) so that non-English speakers can also have access to some of the ideas that shape literacy and development programmes.

Unlike in neighbouring India, the need for English language in Nepal has been initiated by foreign development agencies rather than by government administration - most Government letters and reports are still written in Nepali only. The use of English language within the local NGO scene is a direct consequence of the need for funding. This is not to say that all articles and reports written in English should be viewed with suspicion, but that we should be acutely aware that the selection I review in this paper represents only a tiny part (but the most visible) of the overall discussion on literacy in Nepal. Most of the discussion does not reach any paper and takes place informally in teashops and offices.

b. Issues and themes

It may seem strange to begin a literature review by pointing to its limitations as an indicator of issues being discussed, but I feel that this review should be seen as a snapshot. We need to be aware of what lies outside the literature, as much as what has been included. Before going on to review articles in detail, I will therefore highlight the main areas that are covered in the literature as well as suggesting some of the issues that have rarely been written about.

Within the general field of literacy, the organisational and supervision structures of programmes have tended to receive most critical analysis by the commentators on Government programmes (e.g. BPEP Masterplan, 1991, Crowley, 1990). The effectiveness of literacy programmes as indicated by drop-out rates, reading, writing and arithmetic skills gained and retained, and the impact of literacy on health, hygiene etc., is evaluated in quantitative terms in numerous accounts (e.g.

Comings, Shrestha and Smith, 1992, RIDA, 1988, CERID, 1985). Reflections on the more qualitative impact of literacy on people's lives are rare - Parajuli and Enslin's article on a "small experiment" in women's literacy (1990) being the only in-depth account I came across.

Related to this bias towards quantitative research, is the lack of any discussion of the objectives of literacy programmes and their ideologies. The starting point of nearly all articles is that literacy must be a 'good thing', although implicit in many of the problems described in articles, e.g. the failure of village reading centres (RIDA, 1988), is the whole question of whether this kind of literacy was needed in such a remote area. With the linking of literacy to "skills for Democracy" and political activity (CERID, 1994), discussion of programme ideology amongst literacy workers is quite common - but this would appear to be an area of verbal rather than written debate. Likewise, issues around selection, training of facilitators and supervision of a supportive professional kind, rather than 'inspection', were only ever touched upon in most articles (Shrestha, 1993 and Literacy Linkage Program, 1994, being two notable exceptions), though these again are a frequent topic of conversation. There are however several manuals for trainers and accounts of training programmes (e.g. SC-USA, 1992, "Report of Learner Generated Material Development Training of Trainers Workshop"). Another area which has received more attention since 1990 when minority groups were given greater recognition is that of language and how the use of Nepali, rather than participants' own mother tongue, affects literacy learning (e.g. Manandhar, 1993).

Moving on to post-literacy, methods and curriculum have received a lot of attention. Save the Children-USA (SC-USA) describe their model of family literacy, learner-generated material and language experience approach (Manandhar, Leslie & Shrestha, 1994). Leve (1993) takes a broad look at how class participants have used their literacy skills five years on. The "Impact Study of Ilaka 1 Program Gorkha District" (SC-USA, 1994) tries to analyse how far non-formal education, as opposed to the other programme activities, can be said to have caused changes in participants' lives. Several articles describe post-literacy programmes linking literacy activities to other sectoral activities (e.g. Comings et al, 1994, for health;

Manandhar & Leslie, 1994, for income generation). Tuladhar (1994) describes how participatory video-making can become a way of empowering women and enabling them to use their literacy skills. Government projects discuss more policy-related issues in post-literacy - how to change "big women's"[2] attitudes towards "illiterate women" and how to conduct more effective literacy awareness-raising campaigns (BPEP, 1993).

Gender issues are discussed more frequently in relation to post-literacy - the need for men's support (Manandhar, 1994), how literacy adds to women's self-esteem (Comings et al, 1994) and can lead to social action (Parajuli, 1990, Reinhold, 1993). Discussion of barriers to women's participation in literacy programmes appears in evaluation reports of the Seti Project and BPEP (e.g. the need for time-saving devices, BPEP, 1993). It is worth noting here that the Government statistics on education have been gender-disaggregated for several years and serve as a model for the NGOs' programmes.

I have included the literature on visual literacy in this review since this is an area where there has been an impressive amount of original research conducted in Nepal (Walker, 1979; McBean, 1989). The findings of these studies, regarding how people can improve their visual literacy skills, should influence the kind of literacy materials produced and the design of programmes. However, visual literacy seems to be an issue which, apart from a World Education monograph (1989), is not discussed in the articles on 'literacy programmes'; it appears only as a separate topic. This perhaps points to the omission within much of this material on literacy and post-literacy to consider what literacies are already present in the society and to build upon the skills people already possess.

3. Review of the literature

I will begin this review with a more detailed account of the articles that have attempted to place experiences with literacy in Nepal in the context of the wider debates about the objectives, design and planning of literacy programmes. I will then go on to describe reports and other materials that focus on specific projects or single issues. Rather than breaking up the text with sub-headings, I will highlight the main themes in bold print(in some cases, this may be the name of the project described in articles) to help the reader to focus on issues or subjects of interest.

"A Secondary Analysis of a Nepalese National Literacy Program" by Comings, Shrestha and Smith (1992) looks at issues arising from **evaluations of five adult literacy programmes and two out-of-school children's programmes** between 1986 and 1990. A brief history of the National Literacy Programme is given, including an idea of the teaching methods, materials and the institutional structures used. The findings of the evaluations are analysed in terms of the following issues : drop-out rates, female participation, language of instruction, skill acquisition, retention, changes in attitudes and knowledge, effects on primary schools and costs. Drop-out rates proved no lower than in the formal system - one reason for this seemed to be that literacy facilitators treated the adult participants as children. Female participation was always found to be greater than men's (at least 70% of class populations), even if the programmes were not specifically designed for women. There was no significant difference between men's and women's performance, except in mathematics where men scored higher. Oral fluency in Nepali was shown to improve during the course (all courses were run in Nepali, even for non-Nepali speaking populations). The skill level reached during a six month course was equivalent to Grade 3 at primary level, and skills were apparently retained, in some cases even improved, after the course had finished. Positive changes in attitude towards subjects such as family planning, health and ecology were evident in the Women's Social Service Co-ordinating Committee programme. Attitudes towards sending girls to school improved, and the studies suggested that out-of-school literacy classes for children increased participation rates, equity and efficiency. Costs were compared with primary schools and between the various literacy programmes, showing that opportunity costs were far less for the out-of-school programmes as they ran only two hours a day. The article concludes that

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[2] 'Big' here has been taken directly from the Nepali word *thulo* which is used to refer to the 'big' (important) people in the district. In this context, the 'big' women might be the wives of the district chief or female staff in high positions in government departments or district offices.

teacher training and supervision are important to lower drop-out rates and that economies of scale will reduce the per-participant costs.

Other articles by Comings concentrate specifically on **post-literacy**. "Literacy Skill Retention in Adult Students in Developing Countries" (1994) compares the findings of the above study with case-studies from India, Bangladesh, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. He highlights the difficulty of analysing the data since test scores were not available for the beginning, end and an interval after the literacy classes; it is not clear what "good" means; and there is no way to measure the quality of the different educational interventions in the five countries. However the studies did indicate "that a literacy program must continue instruction for at least a similar period of time if it is to have a lasting effect". Retention scores seemed to be highest in oral reading skills and lower for comprehension, writing and maths.

"Women's Literacy : the Connection to Health and Family Planning" (Comings, Smith and Shrestha, 1994) looks in detail at the **Health Education and Adult Literacy** project (HEAL) in Central Nepal. The project aimed to increase the literacy skills and health and family planning knowledge of illiterate female Community Health Volunteers (CHV) and the young mothers with whom they worked. A basic literacy course was followed by a three month post-literacy course focused on health content and ended with a twelve month continuing education course facilitated by the CHV herself. The women became more confident during the project, not just learning to read and write, but understanding health issues and using the available health services. The final evaluation report of the HEAL project (Smith, 1994) describes some possible constraints against wider implementation, such as the fact that most district education office staff saw HEAL as a "health" project and therefore not part of their responsibility. This report also contains detailed accounts of the materials developed for the project.

Another example of a literacy programme focused on women is "From Learning Literacy to Regenerating Women's Space : A Story of Women's Empowerment in Nepal" (Parajuli and Enslin, 1990). This in-depth personal account of a "small experiment" in Gunjanagar village explores how literacy can be an enabling factor in the process of **empowering women**. The authors describe how the literacy classes "gave little new knowledge but gave a moral strength and a legitimate space (for women) to retell their untold stories". The women's songs and detailed accounts of the struggles encountered give an insight into how the Freirian-modelled literacy classes led to the women initiating action on wife-beating, establishing a women's centre and learning to express themselves through song and drama. The article argues that "socio-cultural consciousness does not have to be brought from outside but can be generated by redefining and reinterpreting women's position in traditional Nepalese society", and that reading and writing, "if grounded in local realities and dialogical in method" can be a real force for initiating empowerment of disadvantaged groups.

Reinhold's "Working with Rural Communities in Nepal: Some Principles of Non-formal Education Intervention" (1993) also looks at how becoming literate can affect women's lives. Starting with an account of the history of non-formal education in Nepal, the author goes on to describe Save the Children USA's (SC-USA) non-formal education programme in Gorkha, illustrating it with case studies of participants and gender-disaggregated statistics on programme participation and enrolment. The "relevant curriculum" (ranging from health information to issues of environmental conservation) is shown to have had an impact on women's lives, causing behavioural changes such as the number of smokers decreasing and class participants being "easier to motivate for various community development activities". The author describes how the literacy programme expanded to become an integrated women's development programme, showing the value of group work for rural women. **Obstacles to women's participation** in classes are analysed with some interesting examples - such as the non-literate in-laws feeling threatened by the daughter-in-law becoming literate. A major constraint was also childcare responsibilities, so SC-USA have now experimented with a home-based rotating childcare scheme. Finally, six principles are articulated for planning and implementing non-formal education programmes:

i) make the curriculum relevant

ii) require community initiative through participation in management, planning, fees etc.

iii) locate the facility close to community

iv) integrate the program approach across sectors

v) be prepared to meet demand for further support aroused by raising awareness

vi) expect that by empowering women, issues of child-care responsibilities and supporting healthy child development will come to the forefront.

"Empowering Women and Families Through Literacy in Nepal" (Manandhar, U. and K. Leslie, 1994) describes how SC-USA's post- literacy materials have promoted the idea of women working in groups and starting income-generating activities. The literacy course also introduces training about legal issues, "about some of the laws which protect women in society". The article describes the social changes that women experienced as a result of becoming literate and concludes by explaining SC-USA's current initiatives (e.g. language experience approach) designed to "address the literacy needs of the minority groups". The question of whether literacy should be taught in Nepali or the mother tongue of certain ethnic groups is addressed more fully in "SC-USA : Dilemma of Literacy in a Multi-Lingual Environment" (Manandhar, 1993). This study, based on the areas where BASE, Redd Bama and SC-USA were working, tested literacy class participants' recognition and understanding of illustrations, words and sentences taken from Nepali language literacy primers. Though a majority of participants from Maithili, Magar and Tharu-speaking communities could recognise the Nepali words, not many could understand them and in some cases, "Nepali words have assumed other meanings" in these communities. The study raises questions about the quality of teaching and learning pace, participants' motivation to learn Nepali and the need to develop multiple versions of "Naya Goreto"[3] and a dictionary.

SC-USA's programme in Gorkha has been the focus of many articles and evaluation reports. Lauren Leve's "Five Year Retrospective Evaluation : 1983-87 Takukot/ Majhlakuribot Adult Literacy Initiative" (1993) looks in detail at participants from the literacy course five years ago, evaluating not only how many people can still read and write (42%) but in what ways they use their literacy skills. Examples include reading product labels, helping children with homework and 14% of the women had joined school after the literacy course ended. The report also looks at 'empowerment', describing how many of the women changed their names to more Sanskritised names after becoming literate as an expression of their new self-esteem. "Participatory Development: a case study of the NFE project in Takukot panchayat of the Gorkha District" (Sob & Leslie, 1988) is an earlier evaluation report which also documents behavioural changes as a result of literacy classes (e.g. all one class stopped smoking). A more recent report, "SC-USA : Impact Study of Ilaka 1 Program Gorkha District" (1994), looks in detail at the impact of non-formal education on the utilisation of health services, such as the take-up of contraceptives. Although there are seen to be positive trends in health practices, the report highlights the difficulty of establishing which programme (health or NFE) had produced this effect.

"Family Literacy in Nepal: a Case Study from Save the Children/US Nepal Field Office" by Udaya Manandhar, Keith Leslie and B.M. Shrestha (1994) focuses on the family literacy programme which was developed two years ago. According to the authors, this programme has already proved "much more than the 'inter-generation transfer of literate behavior' that has been described as 'Family Literacy' in the United States". The project began by identifying the ways in which literacy could improve the quality of family life amongst the Kumal community in the pilot village of Adai Gaon. To meet the need for childcare information, a Nepali 'baby book' was developed with health information and space to record various stages in the baby's life. Other activities included children writing down family history and stories, a homework club in the community and a notebook system to improve communication between school and parents. Writing family stories and using a notebook to communicate with teachers proved too time-consuming for all

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[3] Meaning "New Way" - the basic adult literacy primer used by most Government and NGO programmes

concerned, but the baby book and the homework club seemed to bring family members closer together.

The **need for systematic documentation** of literacy programmes is noted by SC-USA in the above paper and has resulted in several agencies trying to collect and collate information about non-formal education in Nepal. World Education was the first to compile a directory of agencies working in non-formal education (Agencies Involved in Nonformal Adult Education and Out-of-School Children's Education in Nepal, 1992), listing the type and coverage of programme, objectives, materials produced and funding. Another useful publication of this type, though not specifically about literacy agencies, is UNICEF's Compendium of NGOs in Nepal , 1991. Literacy Linkage Program is a project that was set up under Tribhuvan University's Centre for Education Research Innovation and Development (CERID) with the aim of facilitating the sharing of resources and information between various literacy programmes.

Of the publications produced by **Literacy Linkage Program**, NFE Personnel in Nepal : a Profile, 1993, consisting of information on literacy trainers, and Needs, Interests and Resources of NFE Agencies in Nepal , 1993, containing information on various NGO literacy programmes, provide the most useful starting point for **"networking"**. Several seminar and workshop reports (e.g. "Grassroots-level Planning and Materials Development: a Workshop Report", 1992) detail materials and plans used for various sessions but lack enough narrative to make them accessible to people who were not present at the event. "Literacy Camp in Nepal" (Literacy Linkage Program, 1994) is the exception, containing discussion and papers presented at a training programme for "literacy professionals". The report includes a discussion on the uses of literacy and overviews of certain NGOs' literacy activities. Literacy Linkage Program have also produced training materials (self-learning modules on topics such as "Oral History", "Gender and development issues in literacy" and "Whole Language") in co-operation with the University of Massachusetts, as another of their objectives is to provide distance learning facilities for literacy facilitators in Nepal.

Sumon Tuladhar, Literacy Linkage Program Co-ordinator, has conducted a pilot project using **participatory video** techniques in a village near Kathmandu. "Participatory Video as a Post-Literacy Activity for Women in Rural Nepal" (1994) describes the project, concluding that "participatory video technology is an extremely effective catalyst for motivating women to recognize their potential and to develop their self-confidence". The women were encouraged to use their literacy skills by writing the story board for the videotaping of the drama. The article includes several observations about the male/female dynamics of this process and how important it was to have a female facilitator.

CERID have produced many detailed **evaluation reports** of literacy initiatives around the country - for example, "Non-Formal Education and Rural Income Generation for Chepang Women and Youth" (1987) and "The Chelibeti Programme" (1992). Regular reports of the major research activities conducted by CERID are published in their journal, Education and Development. "Perspectives of CERID's Library and Documentation Service : Status Study Report", 1993, lists all their publications until 1993 and abstracts articles and reports from 1989 - 90. The seminar report, "Nonformal Education : Policy Direction for National Development" (1994), contains a provocative paper by C.N. Aryal on **policy issues within NFE** in Nepal - he begins by looking at how non-formal education fits into the agenda of the main political parties. C.K. Shrestha's paper in the same report takes a critical look at the role of NGOs in adult education.

UNICEF is another source of documentation on the major literacy programmes, given their continued financial support. Besides various evaluation reports (e.g. "Evaluation Study of Literacy Programme of SFDP^4 and PCRW^5 ", 1990), their Women and Children in Nepal : A Situational Analysis, 1992, has a section on Literacy which gives an overview of the major

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4 Small Farmer Development Project (started in 1975 as a pilot project by the Agriculture Development Bank of Nepal)
5 Production Credit for Rural Women (started in 1982 by the Women's Development Section of the Ministry of Local Development)

programmes and includes tables on government expenditure on basic education and literacy. A "Report on the National Seminar on the Girl Child", 1989, WSCC/UNICEF, covers **policy issues for promoting girls' literacy** - such as language of instruction, timing and awareness campaigns. USAID, another major donor, has recently produced an evaluation report of the adult literacy components of nine USAID- funded projects (Williams & Ranjitkar,1994). Each project (including CARE, PACT, SC-USA, World Education, and UMN) is presented separately with recommendations for improvement. Issues highlighted include selection of facilitators (e.g. "non-teachers have lower literacy skills but use *Naya Goreto* more") and the problems of scaling up, given the present capacity of District Education Offices.

World Education's key position in relation to the Government and NGO literacy programmes in Nepal has enabled them to produce wide-ranging accounts of the literacy scene. "The Nepal National Literacy Program" (1989) describes the **history and development of the government literacy programme in Nepal** as a "case study from which other literacy program designers can learn much about how to do their jobs". The monograph details World Education's role in literacy development and the sources for the present day government programme, and highlights the issues encountered when the original team developed the course *Naya Goreto*. These included : when is a person literate? one language or many? a single set of materials or variation? visual literacy? As the account is written by the people involved at the beginning of the venture, it contains many interesting observations on how the materials were written, how the course was intended to be taught and details of how NGOs and Ministry interacted (who did what). More recently, Chij Kumar Shrestha has written about present dilemmas and issues in literacy development, focusing - though not exclusively - on NGOs ("A Study on Supply and Demand for Nonformal Education in Nepal", World Education, 1993). This study, which is based on interviews with 50 NGOs, **INGOs and GOs running literacy programmes**, serves as a good introduction to the many issues within literacy in Nepal, as well as providing insights into why literacy programmes are currently run as they are

(e.g. many NGOs said they used the Government materials because they did not want to "contest" the government's programme). Shrestha summarises the history, the various functions of literacy classes (e.g. group building or an NGO strengthening process), the main problems and constraints. He then analyses the issues emerging from his interviews : non-formal education classes alone are not an effective or sustainable strategy, more experimentation as regards the multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment is needed and NGO activities should be more co-ordinated. He suggests that no NGOs have yet got the resources to fully incorporate post-literacy activities into their programmes, though they consider it a need. Post-literacy materials at present lack variety, being all linked to development topics, rather than consisting of entertaining stories.

The **two major Government pilot projects** in non-formal education, **Seti Project and BPEP (Basic and Primary Education Project)**, have produced a wealth of material - literacy materials, evaluation reports, discussion papers and proposals. The philosophy of the Seti Project, that of making education relevant to the needs of the remote area of the Far West is described in detail by the project's first technical advisor, Nicholas Bennett (e.g. "Action not Words: the Need to Make Education a Force for Rural Development" in "A Final Report of a National Workshop on Educational Innovation", 1983, Pokhara, Nepal.). The integrated approach - of the literacy activities supporting the interventions in formal education - comes out clearly in Bennett's writing, as does the importance in a remote area of developing administrative structures for distribution of literacy primers and local training. The literacy programme for out-of-school girls (Cheli Beti Programme) was developed by Shashi Maya Shrestha - she describes (Junge & Shrestha, 1984) the constraints of setting up literacy classes for girls in the Far West, an area where little value is placed on women's education. Many articles have been written about the Seti Project's literacy initiatives : e.g. Kane, 1991, "Breaking Resistance to Education in Nepal's Remote Seti Zone"; Robinson, 1987, "Girls Leave the Cattle"; Chlebowska, 1989, "On The Slopes of the Himalayas : Rural Education in Nepal". Robinson's "Learning to Read, Then Learning to Think", 1988, questions the assumed link between gaining literacy

skills and increased awareness in the Seti Project's adult education programme. Evaluation reports of the Seti Project include RIDA's "Functional Adult Education Programme : an evaluation report" (1988) which looks in detail at how the literacy course affected participants' behaviour in areas like health and sanitation practices. Crowley's (the last technical advisor) report, "The Seti Project" , 1991, compares this evaluation with a previous evaluation of the project as a whole (CERID : "Education for Rural Development in Seti Zone : An Evaluation Report", 1986). He gives a detailed account of objectives and methodology of the project and many statistics on the successes.

The work of the Seti Project and Primary Education Project (which had experimented on a small scale with out-of-school children's classes) culminated in the drafting of the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) Masterplan (July, 1991). This huge document covers the history and development of these projects in the context of non-formal education in Nepal and contains a lot of information on the constraints of implementing large-scale literacy programmes, examination of objectives and detailed plans of options for the proposed BPEP. The background information on each section (e.g. Adult Education) gives a good overview of the issues and problems facing programmers in that area of literacy, written by the relevant Seti Project and PEP staff. BPEP's non-formal programme has been well-documented by the Evaluation Unit and donor agencies. DANIDA's Appraisal Report on DANIDA support for Basic and Primary Education (April 1992) analyses the issues facing the **out-of-school children's literacy programme**, also describing a proposed three-tier model of functional literacy to make post-literacy work more vocationally-oriented. BPEP carried out an in-depth evaluation of the programme (including literacy components) in 1993 ("An Evaluation Report on some Primary Education Project Components", BPEP Evaluation Unit). The report describes the women's education and out-of-school children's literacy programmes in detail, giving statistics on drop-out rates and achievement tests and highlighting critical issues in each programme. These include: equivalence issues (for out-of-school children), inadequate follow-up, weak supervision, and literacy primers having little scope to accommodate

participants' experience. A more bottom-up approach is recommended in future, with a study proposed on "big[6] women's perception towards women's/girls' education" and on improving follow-up through post-literacy by correspondence. Another report which brings up issues of more general relevance is Bejuna Joshi's "Study of Non-Formal Education Programme for Out-of-school Children" (UNICEF 1989). For example, findings showed no difference between Nepali speaking and non-Nepali speaking children in literacy test results, though 60% of teachers said they had problems communicating with their Tharu and Magar students. The report also highlights the ethnic differences in reasons for non-enrolment of children at school.

VSO volunteers working within BPEP's non-formal education programme produce a regular newsletter, BPEP Talk (in English and Nepali), to share ideas between themselves and colleagues about materials and issues within the programme. A recent issue (Issue 11, 1994) includes an article on SC-USA's approach to literacy development "Language Experience Approach in Siraha" (Heather Varden) and "Moving into Phase III : an attempt at the development of ten village reading centres" (Claudia McLoughlin). The latter article describes post-literacy activities in Dhankuta district of BPEP, highlighting the gap between central office and the field : local staff were not aware of the rationale behind the post-literacy programme.

The Ministry of Education's Evaluation Department produces extensive statistical reports on the formal and non-formal programmes, giving gender-disaggregated statistics on class enrolment and attendance by area. They have also produced descriptive pamphlets about their non-formal education programmes, detailing for example the methods and materials used in their adult literacy courses. The Facilitator's Guidebook for "Naya Goreto" is available in an English translation. Selections from Literacy Materials in Asia and the Pacific (1989) contains illustrations of literacy materials from Nepal, with English translations. A comprehensive report about all Government initiatives in non-formal education was produced for the Jomtien conference in 1990 ("Ministry of Education and Culture: World Conference on

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6 See footnote 2

Education for All"). This report includes a history of the Nepal National Literacy Campaign and a critical account of how the Seti Project was "misunderstood". Several members of the Ministry of Education have written papers or books about their particular literacy interventions - e.g. Neelam Basnet, former chief of the Women's Education Unit, on girls' literacy courses (1991) and T.B. Manandhar on the Seti Project, "Increasing the relevance of education for rural development", 1988. "Impact of parents' literacy on school enrolments and retention of children : the case of Nepal" by Kasaju, P. and T.B. Manandhar (in Carron and Bordia, 1985) looks at the ways in which functional literacy can contribute to development (e.g. promoting interpersonal communication, participation in community affairs and political processes) as a context for comparing the attitudes of literate and illiterate parents towards education. They conclude that the **impact of adult literacy on enrolment** seems positive and that education of parents contributes to better education of children.

All the **international NGOs** (e.g. Redd Bama, ActionAid, SCF-UK) describe and evaluate their literacy components or programmes in their Annual Reports, though they understandably tend to emphasise 'successes' over problems. SC-USA have produced separate reports on their literacy programmes (as mentioned earlier), as does World Education. Articles on ActionAid's literacy programmes can be found in their regular magazine Common Cause. Education Action, "the bilingual magazine for ActionAid Education fieldworkers" which has had three issues so far, has also covered the Nepal literacy programme (e.g. "Action starts from education: literacy and empowerment in Nepal", by Shridar Lamichane, Issue 4, December 1994). United Mission to Nepal (UMN) have produced a short brochure that accompanies their series of **post-literacy readers**, the Pipal[7] books. They describe how the books have been produced using the Language Experience Method : real-life stories of people living in their project areas (told orally) have been written down by project workers, then edited and illustrated. The planned series of 100 books are colour graded and aim at

providing adult readers with "an easy transition from oral communication to the conventions of print" (UMN, 1993). Care International in Nepal have outlined how they intend to develop their literacy programme, from an approach that was previously centred on physical infrastructure ("Non Formal Education Strategy", 1994).

There has been less documentation of **local NGOs' literacy programmes**, though the regular newsletter published by Innovative Forum (Sambadak[8]) has many articles exploring issues and describing local programmes, particularly in post-literacy. The newsletter, which has the objective of providing a forum to share and discuss ideas about literacy in Nepal, is published in Nepali : a table of contents is available in English as part of an evaluation conducted for UNICEF (1993). Bikas[9], a quarterly journal published in Nepali by the NGO, Sustainable Livelihood Forum, encourages fieldworkers to take a more critical look at development initiatives, including literacy. Innovative Forum also produced an evaluation report for UNICEF of all the NGOs receiving support for literacy programmes (Messerschmidt, D., J. Sowenwine and IFCD, 1993). Occasionally NGO literacy programmes have been featured in the Kathmandu press, for example, "Building up the base" by B. Bhattarai in The Rising Nepal (28/4/93) which describes the "bottom-up" approach of the large Tharu literacy programme, BASE, in Dang district. SPACE has produced detailed reports of their programmes in Rupandehi, Kapilbastu and Sindhuli (1990, '92, '94). These honest accounts question the role of SPACE in the communities where they work (e.g. "Should we dump the packaged programmes or develop our listening capacity to hear the people?") and illustrate how literacy is just one element of their whole approach to community projects.

Publishing and distribution networks are key to developing post-literacy programmes. I found only one paper on this subject and, though dated, it gives a good overview of the issues involved in trying to ensure that rural populations have access to printed materials. Books for the Rural Areas of South Asia (Thapar, 1975)

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[7] Pipal refers to the pipal tree under whose shade people sit to chat and tell stories.

[8] Sambadak means literally "initiator of dialogue or interaction"

[9] Bikas means "development"

has a short section on Nepal describing the constraints on publishing - the main one being India with their superior printing facilities and Indian wholesalers offering large discounts to institutions in Nepal thereby bypassing local trade. The single effective market is said to be in Kathmandu - textbooks are the only books to be found in rural areas. There were no training facilities in Nepal for publishing nor for book-selling personnel.

Visual literacy is a subject that has been well-researched and documented in Nepal and is also of particular relevance to post-literacy. Fussell and Haaland's Communicating with Pictures in Nepal (UNICEF, 1976) was the first work of this kind, testing villagers' understanding of different kinds of pictures (e.g. three tone drawing, cartoon and "block out"). David Walker's study Understanding Pictures (University of Massachusetts, 1979) goes further into how and why villagers can interpret certain types of pictures. He carried out field research in Central Nepal using sixteen tests with sample groups from urban and rural areas, educated and non-educated. The tests were designed to explore different aspects of visual literacy and showed that the recognition of familiar objects was easier than the comprehension of pictorial space. Walker draws out the implications of this research for the production of materials by development agencies. He suggests that villagers will need to systematically learn certain visual conventions, such as representing perspective, before pictures involving an understanding of depth can convey any meaning. This book contains many examples of literacy and development materials from Nepal analysed from a visual literacy perspective.

Ten years on, George McBean's study, Rethinking Visual Literacy : Helping Pre-Literates Learn (UNICEF Nepal, 1989), looked again at how villagers can improve their visual literacy (his tests were disaggregated by gender). His research in the Mid-West of Nepal looked not just at comprehension of "development illustrations" but at what attracts and influences people. Working on the assumption that learning to 'read' pictures can be quicker than learning to read words, McBean experimented with "overt teaching of illustration techniques" to see how people improved their understanding of perspective and how still pictures can represent movement. The

study shows that pictures in development publications such as extension materials should not just reflect local imagery and conditions, thereby "denying the imagination of realms outside peoples' experience". Video literacy was also looked at in a small study, showing that a drama and a cartoon were more popular with the rural audience, and conveyed the message more effectively than a documentary.

"Photographing Literacy Practices in Kathmandu" by David Barton (Centre for Language in Social Life, Working Paper Series 27, 1991) is a brief account of how **photographs were used as a research tool** to discuss literacy practices in Nepal with participants in a Kathmandu seminar. The photographs of scenes, like people standing around a newspaper-seller reading the newspapers laid out on the street, give a surprising impression of "a lot of literacy" in a country with one of the lowest levels of literacy in the world. The photographs stimulated discussion about the differences in literacy practices between urban and rural areas and between men and women in Nepal.

4. Where to find the literature

The material on literacy in Nepal is widely scattered, making it difficult to obtain in Nepal or the UK. Apart from the published articles and books, many of the reports mentioned above would need to be requested from the individual agencies concerned, and in the case of certain project documents, they may no longer be held (especially those produced by Government programmes several years ago). For documents on the Seti Project and BPEP (including the Masterplan), VSO's Resource Centres in Kathmandu and London could be approached. The Documentation Centres of the Agricultural Extension and Rural Development Department and the Department of Education Studies and Management at Reading University hold most of the reports and articles produced by NGOs mentioned in this review. The materials on visual literacy are available at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University (in the PRA Reading Room). The Summer Institute of Linguistics in Buckinghamshire also holds a collection of literacy primers in Nepali, Gurung and Chepang languages.

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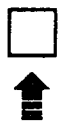
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