



An Analytical Study on Illiteracy and Government Initiative in India

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Abstract:

Illiteracy is one of the biggest social issues of the world today. In India, both rural and urban communities are facing these problems of illiteracy. The social causes of illiteracy are: lack of funds for education; poverty; isolation; hunger; and education systems imposed from outside. Millions of people speak non-transcribed languages. Many live in environments and conditions where written communications are not necessary or available. UNESCO has been working to realize the vision of literacy for all since 1946 in the belief that acquiring and improving literacy skills throughout life is an intrinsic part of the right to education and brings with it huge empowerment and benefits. But despite progress globally, 763 million adults still cannot read and write. Literacy drives sustainable development, enables greater participation in the labour market, improves child and family health and nutrition, reduces poverty and expands life opportunities. As illiteracy is the root cause of all evils, it should be the number one agenda of the government. Though the government has taken various measures like making primary education free and compulsory, girls' education up to higher secondary level free and the highest allocation for education in our national budget, still the measures are inadequate. The government must ensure that the money is being utilized properly and effectively. The government needs to set up more educational institutions, make reading materials cheap and available and guarantee employment after completing education. Private sectors,



NGOs, academicians and patrons of learning should come forward to spread the light of education in every house. We also have to make people aware of the importance of education. Media can play a great role in this regard. Reducing poverty is the most effective way of removing illiteracy from society. Hence, government must work in coordination with others to fight poverty and increase literacy rate. Several schemes had been launched to ensure the right to menaces education in the country. The National Policy on Education in the year 1986 declared that the whole nation must commit itself to drive away the of illiteracy, especially among the young population. The National Literacy Mission in 1988 made literacy a community endeavour, which seems to bite the dust today as it has not been able to prevent dropouts among school children and illiteracy prevails. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was launched in 2001 to ensure that all children in the 6-14 years of age-group attend school and complete eight years of schooling by 2010. An important component of the scheme is the Education Guarantee Scheme and alternative and innovative education, meant primarily for children in areas with no formal school within one-kilometre radius.

Keywords: Education, Illiteracy, Communities, Indians, Schemes

❖ Introduction:

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has drafted a definition of literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society'. The National Literacy Mission defines literacy as acquiring the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic and the ability to apply them to one's day-to-day life. The achievement of functional literacy implies (i) self-reliance in 3 R's, (ii) awareness of the causes of deprivation and the ability to move towards amelioration of their condition by participating in the process of development, (iii) acquiring skills to improve economic status and general well-being, and (iv) imbibing values such as national integration, conservation of the environment, women's equality, observance of small family norms.



Following UNESCO, the Census in India in 1991 also defined 'literate person as one who can read and write 'with understanding' in any Indian language, and not merely read and write. Those who can read but cannot write are not literate. Formal education in a school is not necessary for a person to be considered as literate.

The working definition of literacy in the Indian census since 1991 is as follows: Literacy rate, also called the "effective literacy rate"; the total percentage of the population of an area at a particular time aged seven years or above, who can read and write with understanding. Here the denominator is the population aged seven years or more. The total percentage of the people of an area at a particular time who can read and write with understanding, taking the total population of the area (including below seven years of age) as the denominator.

Literacy in India is a key for socio-economic progress, and the Indian literacy rate has grown to 73 per cent (2011 Census figure) with recent reports of 80 per cent literacy. The literacy rate at the end of British rule in 1947 was around 17 per cent. Although, this was greater than six-fold improvement, the level is below the world average literacy rate of 84 per cent. Despite government programmes, India's literacy rate increased 'sluggishly'. The 2011 Census, indicated a 2001-2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2 per cent, which is slower than the growth as seen during the previous decade. A 1990 study estimated that it would take until 2060 for India to achieve universal literacy at then-current rate of progress.

There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14 per cent for men and 65.46 per cent for women. The census provided a positive indication that growth in female literacy rates (11.8%) was substantially faster than in male literacy rates (6.9%) in the 2001-2011 decadal period, which means the gender gap appears to be narrowing.

❖ Variations in Literacy rate between states:

The average literacy rate in India stands at 74.04%. While Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India at 93.91%, Bihar has the lowest literacy rate in India at 63.82%. Several other social indicators of the two states are correlated with these rates, such as life expectancy at birth (71.61 for males and 75 for females in Kerala, 65.66 for males and 64.79 for females in Bihar), infant mortality per 1,000 live births (10 in Kerala, 61 in Bihar), birth rate per 1,000



people (16.9 in Kerala, 30.9 in Bihar) and death rate per 1,000 people (6.4 in Kerala, 7.9 in Bihar).

Every census since 1881 had indicated rising literacy in the country, but the population growth rate had been high enough that the absolute number of illiterate people rose with every decade. The 2001–2011 decade is the second census period (after the 1991–2001 census period) when the absolute number of Indian illiterate population declined (by 31,196,847 people), indicating that the literacy growth rate is now outstripping the population growth rate. Six Indian states account for about 60% of all illiterates in India: Uttar -Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh (including Telangana). Slightly less than half of all Indian illiterates (48.12%) are in the six states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

❖ **Illiteracy in India:**

According to 2011 Census, 26 per cent people of India are illiterate. Whereas according to Census Report of SECC (Socio Economic Caste Census) 2011 more than a third of its 121.08 crore population are non-literate. This is higher than the 32 per cent recorded by the 2011 Census of India. About 6 per cent of 88.4 crore people in rural India are non-literate. The attainment of goal of 'Education for All by 2015' appears to be difficult also because, as per the World Bank, our public spending on education is much lower than other countries. In 2010, for instance, India spent only 3.3 per cent of its GDP on education in comparison to 5.6 per cent by USA, 5 per cent by Russia and 5.9 per cent by France.

The problem of illiteracy among women in our country is worse though sex differentials have narrowed down significantly over the years. As mentioned earlier, though the absolute number of female illiterates has gone down by 11.79 percent during 2001-2011 but it is still high in comparison to other countries. In 2011 Census, the decadal difference in literacy rates for males and females stands at 6.88 and 11.79 percentage points respectively.

The position of children in terms of illiteracy is equally bad. Despite a major improvement in overall literacy rates, the number of children who are not in schools is still high. The literacy rate jumped from 52 per cent in 1991 to 65 per cent in 2001. The absolute number of non-literates dropped for the first time and gross enrolment in government-run primary schools



increased from over 19 million in the 1950s to 114 million by 2001. In spite of all this, 20 per cent of children aged 6 to 14 are still not in school.

❖ **Government Initiative:**

The National Policy on Education (NPE) is a policy formulated by the Government of India in 1968 to promote and regulate education in India. The policy covers elementary education to higher education in both rural and urban India. The new policy lists the specific steps in such detail that it has been described as nothing less than a charter not only for equality of access to education but also for equalization with regard to the status of the disadvantaged sections of society. It lays down that educational transformation, reduction of disparities, universalization of elementary education, adult education, and scientific and technological research would be accepted as national responsibilities for which adequate resources would be provided.

The concept of the national system of education implies that up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, sex or location, have access to education of a comparable quality. It envisages a common educational structure of 10+2+3 for all parts of the country. The break-up of the first 10 years comprises five years of primary education, three years of middle school, and two years of high school. Regarding elementary education, the NPE Policy proposed to ensure that all children who attained the age of 11 years will have had five years of schooling through the non-formal stream. Likewise, it proposed that all children will be provided free and compulsory education up to 14 years of age.

The NPE, 1986 proposed that in the 15-35 age group, a vast programme of adult and continuing education will be implemented through various channels like: (a) establishment of centres in rural areas for continuing education, (b) worker's education through the employers and concerned agencies of the government, (c) radio, television and films as mass and group learning media, (d) creation of learners' groups and organizations, (e) programmes of distance learning, and (f) organizing assistance in self-learning. In 1992, the NPE, 1986 was modified and a programme of action was formulated, which stipulated that about 100 million persons would be covered under the National Programme of Adult Education by 1995.



The **Right to Education (RTE) Act** is completely titled “the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act”. It was passed by the Parliament in August 2009. When the Act came into force in 2010, India became one among 135 countries where education is a fundamental right of every child.

The 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002) inserted Article 21A in the Indian Constitution which states:

“The State shall provide **free and compulsory education to all children of 6 to 14** years in such manner as the State, may by law determine.”

The Act makes it clear that ‘compulsory education’ implies that it is an obligation on the part of the government to ensure the admission, attendance and completion of elementary education of children between the ages of six and fourteen. The word ‘free’ indicates that no charge is payable by the child which may prevent him/her from completing such education.

Social Education 1951-56: The program aimed to promote literacy, extension, general education, leadership training, and social consciousness

Gram Shikshan Mohim 1959: A movement for literacy in the rural areas, it aimed at imparting basic literacy skills within a period of four months.

Farmer's Functional Literacy Project (FFLP) 1967-68: An inter-ministerial project for farmers“ training and functional literacy.

Functional Literacy for Adult Women (FLAW) 1975-76: The scheme included a component which enabled illiterate adult women to acquire functional skills along with literacy to gain better awareness of health, hygiene, childcare practices and in the process facilitated attitudinal changes.

National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) 1978: First nationwide literacy programme was taken up at macro level to eradicate illiteracy through project approach with a massive programme aimed at educating 100 million non-literate adults in the age-group of 15-35 years within a time frame of 5 years



This programme is a joint and collaborative effort of the central government, state governments, union territory administrations, voluntary agencies, universities, colleges and youth centres. education under the NAEP is a package which envisages: (a) imparting literacy skills to the target illiterate population, (b) their functional development, and (c) creation of awareness among them regarding laws and policies of the government for the efficient implementation of the strategy of redistributive justice. Special emphasis is being placed on the education of women, SCS/STs and other weaker sections of society, who comprise the bulk of illiterate population in India.

❖ **Rural Functional Literacy Project (RFLP) & Mass Programme of Functional Literacy (MPFL) 1986:**

To impart functional literacy to all illiterate persons in the age group of 15-35 years who were living in the rural areas by organising specified number of literacy centres. The RFLP is a sub-programme of the NAEP which is fully funded by the central government and implemented by the states and union territories. The broad objectives of this programme are: (a) to develop abilities in the learners to read and write, and (b) to create awareness among the learners about their rights and duties and the benefits they can draw from various schemes of socio-economic development being implemented by the government.

Mass Programme of Functional Literacy (MPFL) 1986: It was launched on May 1, 1986, by involving National Service Scheme (NSS) and other students in colleges and universities on the principle of 'Each One Teach One'.

National Literacy Mission Authority (NLMA) 1988: On 5th May, 1988 a countrywide programme for promoting adult literacy was launched in mission mode under National Literacy Mission (NLM) to impart functional literacy to non-literates in the country in the age group of 15-35 years in a time bound manner.

The Mission also takes into its fold children in the age group of 9-14, in areas not covered by Non-Formal Education programmes to reach the benefits of literacy to out-of-school children as well. The major thrust of these programmes is on the promotion of literacy among women, scheduled castes and tribes and backward classes.



Saakshar Bharat: Scheme of Adult Education and Skill Development, 2009: The scheme was launched on 8th September 2009 and further extended for implementation during 11th and 12th Five Year Plans and concluded on 31.3. 2018.. The principal target was to impart Functional Literacy to 70 million non-literates.

The Saakshar Bharat had 4 broader objectives: to impart Functional literacy to non-literate and non-numerate adults; enable the neoliterate adults to continue their learning beyond basic literacy and acquire equivalency to formal educational system; impart non and neo-literates relevant skill development programmes to improve their earning and living conditions and promote a learning society by providing opportunities to neoliterates for continuing education.

Under Saakshar Bharat programme, around 7.64 crore non-literates had been certified as literates since 2009.**Padhna Likhna Abhiyan:** The scheme was approved on 25.04.2020 for implementation in FY 2020-21 in the midst of Covid-19 pandemic with a financial outlay of Rs.142.61 crore to impart Functional Literacy to 57 lakh non-literates of the age group 15 years and above in the country in both rural and urban areas. The scheme was implemented in 33 States/UTs during FYs 2020-22 with a one-year extension till 31.03.2022.

❖ **Elementary Education:**

Elementary education in India starts from the age of six. The government has made elementary education compulsory and free. The central and state governments have been expanding the provision of formal and non-formal primary education to realize the goal of Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE).

• **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan:**

It is a flagship programme of the government of India, that was started in 2001, to achieve the Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE). The legal backing to SSA was provided when free and compulsory education for the children in the age group of 6-14 was made a fundamental right in the Indian Constitution under Article 21 A.



An important component of the scheme is the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education, meant primarily for children in areas with no formal school within one kilometre radius.

The programme seeks to open new schools in those habitations which do not have schooling facilities and strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional class rooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants. SSA has a special focus on girls' education and children with special needs. SSA also seeks to provide computer education to bridge the digital divide.

- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme:**

Aiming at enhancing enrolment, retention and attendance and simultaneously improving nutritional levels among children, the Mid-Day Meal (MDM) is the world's largest school feeding programme, reaching out to about 12 crore children in over 9.50 lakh schools/EGS centres across the country. The meal is freshly cooked and wholesome. The Mid-Day Meal Programme will also help to increase the literacy levels of the country and develop it.

- ❖ **Conclusion:**

The present illiteracy rate is still high in our country, that is why we are lagging behind in all respects compared to many other nations. If we want to build a happy and prosperous nation, we must remove illiteracy from the country. Not only the government, but every literate person needs to accept the eradication of illiteracy as a personal goal. Every contribution by a literate person can contribute to eradicating the menace.



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