

EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) IN INDIA BY 2000 AD: IMPACT OF NATIONAL LITERACY MISSION (NLM)

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Abstract

The literacy profile of India changed to a new glory in the last decade of 20th century and it was mainly because of launching of National Literacy Mission (NLM) in 1988. The focus of the research paper is on programme implementation for universal literacy – EFA – by ‘2000 AD and threats (nee challenges) for attaining mass education in 21st century. The role of National Adult Education Programme (1978) during 1980’s and National Literacy Mission (1988) made an impact on educational development in India by reducing number of illiterate people inspite of growing population and raising a hope of achievement of EFA by 2000 AD. The campaign approach coupled with role of supporting agencies including higher education institutions shifted the focus on community support and participation in educational development. The problem of gender, social class and location – key issues in disparities in literacy status – was addressed in a systematic manner for promoting ‘equality of opportunity’ and pro-social behavior. The role of governmental departments in key sectors of agriculture and rural development was linked with post-literacy programmes to accelerate pace of national development. The impact of NLM on socio-economic life of communities all over the country with wide geo-political variations – need further analysis in the context of sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2030 AD.

Introduction

In the independent India, the efforts were made by bringing the changes in the concept of adult education to redesignate it as social education while bringing into its ambit the issues emerging as challenges in the developing Indian society following the tasks left in British India. The Education Commission (1964-66) brought to the national agenda the issue of relationship of education, in general and adult education in particular, with socio-economic development of the country and hence the need for concerted efforts for adult literacy. The population specific programmes were also framed in order to meet the requirements of diverse population – tribals, ruralities, women, farmers, industrial workers and so on. The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP), launched in 1978, was the culmination of all the efforts made in adult literacy during the 30 years of



independence, to devise the national perspective of adult education keeping in view the challenges population explosion and poverty on the one hand, and failure of school system to enroll and retain all children in the age-group of 6-14 years for ‘universalization of elementary education’, thereby adding in large number to the illiterate adult population, coupled with failure of adult education programmes to eradicate illiteracy, on the other hand. No doubt, the programme had some achievements in the eradication of illiteracy among adult masses, there were many weaknesses in the implementation of the programme at grassroot level. It was in this context that National Policy on Education (1986) again stated

The whole Nation must pledge itself to the eradication of illiteracy, particularly in the 15-35 age-groups, and emphasized on its linkages with development: Since participation by beneficiaries in the development programmes is of crucial importance, systematic programmes of adult education linked with national goals such as alleviation of poverty, national integration, environmental conservation, energisation of the cultural creativity of the people, observance of small family norm, promotion of women’s equality, etc. will be organized and the existing programme reviewed and strengthened.

India achieved a major success in universal literacy programmes – both for young children in the age-group 6-14 years and adults in the age-group 15+ during 1980s and 1990s to achieve the UNESCO goal of Education for All (EFA) by 2000 AD.

Progress in Literacy Status of India: 1951-2001

The trends in literacy growth over the period 1957 to 2001 as per census data are shown in table 1.

Table 1

Literacy Status of India from 1957-2001: Trends in Progress and Gender Disparity

Census Year	Total Literacy Rate	Decadal Increase	Males Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate	Gender Gap
1951	18.33	--	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	9.97	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	6.15	45.96	21.97	23.99
1981	43.57	9.12	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	8.64	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.83	12.62	75.26	53.67	21.59

Source: Census of India, 2001.



It is evident from table 1 that literacy rate grew from 18.33 in 1951 to 28.30 in 1961 and to 34.45 in 1971, showing a decline in decadal growth of literacy rate from 9.97 to 6.15 over these two decades. There was increment in literacy rate to be 43.57 in 1981 which further improved to 52.21 in 1991 – thus covering the half of Indian populations. The decadal growth in 1980s was 8.64 thanks to launching of National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) in 1978.

The launching of National Literacy Mission (NLM) in 1988, after the implementation of National Policy of Education (1986) was the shift of programme implementation from governmental domain to voluntary movement and community participation in adult literacy as well as in development programmes – a step towards humanistic, approach of ‘equality of opportunity’ for all.

The literacy status over the 1990s improved from 52.21 in 1991 to 64.83 in 2001 – an increment of 12.62, being all time high in independent India. It covered nearly 2/3rd of India’s population raising a hope of universal literacy in near future – though failing to achieve the goal of EFA by 2000 AD.

Gender Gap in Literacy

It may be seen that male literacy rate grew from ‘27.16 to 75.26’ as compared female literacy figures of ‘8.86 to 75.26’ from 1951 to 2001. This speaks of thrust give to women education and also for girl child educability in educational development programmes during the decade 1990s to 2000 (last decade of 20th century). The gender gap also showed an improvement in 1990s (21.59) as compared to earlier figures of 24.84 in 1980s and 26.62 in 1970s. However, it may be noted that the gender gap in literacy, inspite of progress in female literacy, remained higher than that of first census of India – being 1830 in 1951.

It is also a matter of concern that population growth of the country – marked by skewed sex ratio – became an hindrance in universal literacy, as number of illiterates too grew as literacy rate showed a positive increment over the five decades of development of the nation.

Threats to Equality of Opportunities



Along with existing gender disparity in literacy status of Indian population rural-urban divide is visible – nearly two-third of population in rural areas including forests, deserts and coastal regions. The rural-urban divide in literacy stood at 21.2 (urban literacy rate being 79.9 as compared to 58.7 of ruralities). The focus of adult education programmes, this was on women, ruralities and all those deprived sections of society who lagged behind in education, and consequently in socio-economic development.

Strength of National Literacy Mission in Improving Quality of Life

The important aspects of implementation of the literacy programmes, included stress on the evolution of the programme through people's mobilization at the grassroot, enlisting the support of all educated persons, willing to help in movement, and government support – through administrative setup at district level. This was emulated on the success of Ernakulum literacy campaigns in 1989, which led to complete eradication of illiteracy in a time-bound framework. The strategy for literacy was district based programme under the leadership of District level administrators – DCs or collectors – in the committee named Zila Saksharta Committee (ZSS). The programme was in a continuous mode with peoples' voluntary participation in three phases: Total literacy campaign (TLC), followed by Post Literacy Campaign (PLC) and then continuing majority of these converted into PLC and only one fourth of districts could enter CEP phase during implementation from 1990s onwards till 2000 AD.

The success rate in the first phase was tremendous, which was well maintained in post-literacy phase, in which literacy and numeracy skills' were strengthened and also training for empowerment of different communities got initiated, mainly with the help of ministry of rural development. Further programmes for skill development and entrepreneurship got started at village/ block levels in different parts of the country for socio-economic well-being of, the people through literacy-development' linkages.



Impact Assessment

The internal and external evaluation of TLC and PLC programmes in the districts was done by different agencies from time to time, under NLM umbrella, to gauge impact of literacy and continuing education on socio-economic and cultural development of communities – women, farmers, workers, old age people as well as any other specific group. The most perceptible effect was visible on health care, population control measures, schooling of children and support to each other for improvement in quality of life including environmental concerns (Singh, 1998; 2002).

Looking Back and Forward

The success of NLM be seen in new of the emphasis of the government of India in Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97):

Equally important is to improve the quality of human resources through emphasis on the containment of population growth and major overall of education policy to achieve the goal of eliminating illiteracy by the end of 1990s and making education a resource for the mass of people to enable them to participate in productive process and avail of right to work.

Thus the success in improving literacy rate and bringing changes in quality of life may be gauged from the fact that as per census 2011, 3/4th of India is literate as compared to 2/3rd in 2001 and nearly 1/2nd in 1991. However, the NLM could not achieve the laid down objectives and later on it was restricted to Sakshar Bharat Mission (SBM) in 2009. The UNESCO call of EFA by 2000 AD still waits for accomplishment and governmental programmes, under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030 need to be monitored and to be evaluated for achievement of SDG four – pertaining to education for all.

Needless to mention, the era of globalization with its beginning in 1990s has shown its impact on education of masses – deprived along the lines of gender, caste, economic status and other demographic factors – leading to more inequalities. The NEP 2020 has also tried to bring forth a new word ‘socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) for equitable and quality education to all.



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