

## Chapter 1

# An Introduction to Literacy

### **Definitions of LITERACY:**

There are no universal definitions and standards of literacy. Unless otherwise noted, all ratings are based on the most common definition - the ability to read and write at a specified age.

In a literate culture, ideas and information are transmitted and preserved in writing. Literacy is the ability to read or write at a competent level. Reading comprehension is considered a basic skill and fundamental human right by most countries in the world. Literacy is one of the most important skills a person can have. The term 'literacy' originally and most often, applied to written communication; However, it can also be applied to other forms, as in media literacy, computer literacy. It is basically the ability to read and write, communicate and comprehend.

The UNESCO has drafted the following definition: "Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential and to participate fully in the wider society."

Illiteracy, that is the inability to read, write and comprehend is not only a problem plaguing under-developed and the developing nations but also a big problem for the so called developed nations.

To think of illiteracy as an issue that can be completely eradicated, would be being highly optimistic. The trick would be to go steady and try to reduce it.

Absolute eradication of illiteracy would be a myth at this point of time, but we can go for a relative picture so that in the long run,

we are able to control it to a greater extent.

The government and voluntary agencies can come together to curb or at least control this problem and keep it to the minimum.

### **What constitutes literacy**

Literacy as defined by UNESCO is given below.

1. A literate person is one who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement relevant to his everyday life.
2. Literacy is not the simple reading of a word or set of associated symbols and sounds, but an act of critically understanding one's situation in the world.
3. Literacy is not an end in itself but a means of personal liberation and development and extending individual educational efforts involving overall inter-disciplinary responses to concrete problems.
4. A literate person is one who has acquired all the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and whose attainment in reading, writing and numeracy make it possible to use these skills towards his own development as well as that of his community.

The National Literacy Mission defines literacy as acquisition of the skills of reading, writing, arithmetic and the ability to apply them to one's day-to-day life. The achievement of functional literacy implies:

- ◆ Self-reliance in 3 R's
- ◆ Becoming aware of the causes of deprivation and moving towards amelioration of their condition by participating in the process of development
- ◆ Acquiring skills to improve their economic status and general well being

- ◆ Imbibing values of national integration, conservation of environment, women's equality, observance of small family norms, etc.

### **Growth of literacy**

During the British period, progress of education was rather tardy. Between 1881-82 and 1946-47, the number of primary schools grew from 82,916 to 134,866 and the number of students grew from 2,061,541 to 10,525,943. Literacy rates in British India rose from 3.2 % in 1881 to 7.2 % in 1931 and 12.2 % in 1947. In 2000-01, there were 60,840 pre-primary and pre-basic schools and 664,041 primary and junior basic schools. Total enrolment at the primary level increased from 19,200,000 in 1950-51 to 109,800,000 in 2001-02. The number of high schools in 2000-01 was higher than the number of primary schools at the time of independence.

The provision of universal and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6-14 was a cherished national ideal and had been accorded overriding priority by incorporation as a Directive Policy in Article 45 of the Constitution, but it is still to be achieved more than half a century since the Constitution was adopted. Parliament has passed the Constitution 86th Amendment Act, 2002, to make elementary education a Fundamental Right for children in the age group of 6-14 years. In order to provide more funds for education, an education cess of 2 per cent has been imposed on all direct and indirect central taxes through the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2004.

Since Independence, the literacy rate grew from 18.33% in 1951 to 28.30 % in 1961, 34.45 % in 1971, 43.57 % in 1981, 52.21 % in 1991 and 64.84 % in 2001. During the same period, the population grew from 361 million to 1,028 million.

### **Literacy scenario in India**

The Census 2001 provisional reports indicate that India has

made significant progress in the field of literacy during the decade since the previous census in 1991. The literacy rate in 2001 has been recorded at 65.38% as against 52.21% in 1991. The 13.17 percentage points rise in the literacy rate during the period is the highest increase in any decade. Also, for the first time, there is a decline in the absolute number of non-literates during the past 10 years. The total number of non-literates has come down from 320 million in 1991 to 296 million in 2001. During 1991-2000, the population in 7+ age group soared by 171.6 million, while 203.6 million additional persons became literate during that period. Out of 858 million people above the age of seven years, 562 million are now literates. Three-fourths of our male population and more than half of the female population are literate. This indeed is an encouraging indicator for us to speed up our march towards the goal of achieving a sustainable threshold literacy rate of 75%.

### **Female literacy**

According to the last census held in 2001, the percentage of female literacy in the country is 54.16%. The literacy rate in the country has increased from 18.33% in 1951 to 65.38% as per the 2001 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86% in 1951 to 54.16%. It is noticed that the female literacy rate during the period 1991-2001 increased by 14.87%, whereas male literacy rate rose by 11.72%. Hence, the female literacy rate actually increased by 3.15% more when compared to male literacy rate.

### **Factors responsible for poor female literacy rate**

Historically, a variety of factors have been found to be responsible for the poor female literacy rate, viz.

- ◆ Gender based inequality.
- ◆ Social discrimination and economic exploitation.
- ◆ Occupation of girl child in domestic chores.
- ◆ Low enrolment of girls in schools.

- ◆ Low retention rate and high dropout rate.

### **Strategies adopted by the government for enhancing female literacy in the country**

The main strategies adopted by the government for increasing female literacy in the country include:

1. National Literacy Mission for imparting functional literacy
2. Universalisation for Elementary Education
3. Non-Formal Education

### **Contribution of literacy campaigns to female literacy**

The provision of educational opportunities for women has been an important part of the national endeavour in the field of education since India's Independence. Though these endeavours did yield significant results, gender disparity persists with uncompromising tenacity, more so in the rural areas and among the disadvantaged communities. This is not only a matter of national anxiety and concern, but also a matter of national conscience. It is with this concern that the Government of India launched the National Literacy Mission in 1988 for eradication of adult illiteracy. Since women account for an overwhelming percentage of the total number of illiterates, the National Literacy Mission is for all practical purposes a mission for imparting functional literacy to women. Total literacy campaigns launched since 1988 under the aegis of the national emphasis on literacy are making efforts to:

- ◆ Create an environment where women demand knowledge and information, empowering themselves to change their lives.
- ◆ Inculcate in women the confidence that change is possible, if women work collectively.
- ◆ Spread the message that education of women is a precondition for fighting against their oppression.

- ◆ Highlight the plight of the girl child and stress the need for universalization of elementary education as a way of addressing the issue.

Some of the significant ways in which the literacy campaigns have contributed to the promotion of female literacy and women's empowerment are as follows:

### **Heightened social awareness**

Literacy campaigns have heightened social awareness among women regarding the importance of education, both for themselves as well as for their children. Large numbers of women have been participating whole-heartedly in the literacy campaigns as learners and volunteers. Because of the campaign mode and creation of a positive environment for literacy, women receive a social sanction to participate in the literacy programmes. As women come out of their homes and take part in the campaigns with great enthusiasm, they acquire a heightened sense of self-awareness and desire to gain knowledge on a host of women's issues.

### **Increased school enrolment**

The literacy campaigns have also motivated and encouraged women learners to educate their children, particularly girls, by enrolling them in formal schools. An evaluation study of the literacy campaign in Birbhum district shows that the biggest achievement of the adult literacy programme there has been its impact on girls' education. The confidence of the girls, as they perform drill or play football, is the result of the awareness among neo-literate parents that girls need to be educated and outgoing. The need to provide equal opportunity to both girls and boys has also had the effect of generating greater demand for the quantity for both girls and boys and quality of primary schooling.

### **Increase in self-confidence and personality development**

Literacy classes conducted under literacy campaigns have

provided women an opportunity to break the isolation, which is socially structured into their lives, giving them a chance to meet other women and learn collectively- rather than learn singly as individuals. The newly acquired literacy skills have enhanced their ability to solve family problems and learn new skills. Women are communicating how they have started feeling more confident, how their articulation has improved, how they have become more discerning and how they have learnt to function autonomously.

### **Genderequity & women's empowerment**

Total literacy campaigns have provided illiterate adult women, who have been denied access to formal schooling, with a great opportunity for reading, writing, increasing awareness levels and skills training. Literacy campaigns have thus actively promoted gender equity and sought to empower them regarding decision making about themselves, their families and communities. The impact of literacy on women's life has often been dramatic. Experiences of Puddukottai in Tamil Nadu (where women learnt how to bicycle and acquired ownership right in stone quarries) and Nellore in Andhra Pradesh (where a lesson in the literacy Primer inspired women to launch an anti-arrack agitation that later engulfed the entire district and the state) have shown how women have been empowered at individual and collective levels as a result of their participation.

### **Status in family**

Literacy campaigns have played a significant role in improving the status of women within their own families. Whereas traditionally, women have little say in the family decision making, through participation in literacy programmes, they have begun to express their newly found self-belief in having a say both within and without the family.

### **Educational equality**

Another area in which women's equality has shown a major

improvement as a result of adult literacy programmes is the area of enrolment of boys and girls in schools. As a result of higher participation of women in literacy campaigns, the gender gap in literacy levels is gradually getting reduced. Even more significant is the fact that disparity in enrolment of boys and girls in neo-literate households is much lowered, when compared to the non-literate householders.

### **Women as entrepreneurs**

Participation of women in literacy campaigns has opened several opportunities for neo-literate women to step out of the households and involve themselves in some enterprise or a new vocation. The Dumka campaign in Jharkhand has demonstrated how a literacy movement has helped women to take charge of their lives. They have formed a group called “Joga Behna (Awake sister)”, which tries to sensitize the women to the need for collective action against social ills. These women have also set up “Didi Bank” (Sister Bank), which promotes the habits of thrift and savings. Here, women have also learnt to maintain hand pumps, thereby breaking their dependence for repair on mechanics from outside the village.

### **Household savings and access to credit**

In almost all the districts, the literacy campaigns have gone beyond the transaction of mere literacy skills and served to enhance knowledge and skills for better management of expenditure and improving earning capacities. In several districts, the women participants in literacy campaigns have begun to set aside their earnings not only in regular banks but also in special thrift societies. Such societies, as for example in Dumka, are run by the women themselves.

### **Health and hygiene**

Literacy campaigns in most districts have taken up health and hygiene issues as an integral component of adult education programmes. Literacy campaigns have helped to spread

knowledge about health care and nutrition, thereby enabling mothers to keep their family in better health and to care better for their children. Literacy campaigns have also disseminated information for creating awareness about problems of early marriage, spacing and small family norms.



## Chapter 2

# NLM: An introduction

The Census 2001 provisional figures also indicate that the efforts of the nation during the past decade to remove the scourge of illiteracy have not gone in vain. The eradication of illiteracy from a vast country like India beset by several social and economic hurdles is not an easy task. Realizing this, the Centre initiated the National Literacy Mission on May 5, 1988 to impart a new sense of urgency and seriousness to adult education. After the success of the areas specific, time bound voluntary based campaign approach, first in Kottayam city and then in Ernakulam district in Kerala in 1990, the National Literacy Mission had accepted the literacy campaign as the dominant strategy for eradication of illiteracy.

Out of 600 districts in the country, 596 have already been covered under the Total Literacy Campaigns. The number of continuing education districts is 238. The creditable performance of the National Literacy Mission received international recognition when it was awarded the UNESCO Noma Literacy Prize for 1999. The International Jury, while selecting NLM for the prize, recognized its initiation of the Total literacy Campaigns and also its efforts in galvanizing activities towards integration, conservation of the environment, promotion of women's equality and the preservation of family customs and traditions. The jury also appreciated the training imparted by NLM, its syllabus, and the awareness created by it for the demand for raising both the quality and quantity of primary education.

The Bureau of Adult Education and National Literacy Mission, under the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, functions as the Secretariat of the National Literacy Mission Authority. The General Council of the NLMA is headed by the Minister of Human Resource Development and the Executive Council is

headed by the Secretary (Elementary Education and Literacy). The Directorate of Adult Education provides necessary technical and resource support to the NLMA.

The National Literacy Mission was revitalized on September 30, 1999. The mission sought to achieve 75% literacy by imparting functional literacy to non-literates in the 15-35 age group. To tackle the problem of residual illiteracy, now it has been decided to adopt an integrated approach to **Total Literacy Campaigns and Post Literacy Programme**. This means the basic literacy campaigns and post literacy programmes will be implemented under one literacy project called 'Literacy Campaigns an Operation Restoration' to achieve continuity, efficiency and convergence and to minimize unnecessary time lag between the two. Post literacy programmes are treated only as preparatory phases for launching Continuing Education with the ultimate aim of creating a learning society.

In order to promote decentralization, the State Literacy Mission Authorities have been vested with the authority to sanction continuing education projects to districts and literacy related projects to voluntary agencies in their respective states.

The scheme of **Jan Shikshan Sansthan** or Institute of People's Education, previously known as the Scheme of Shramik Vidyapeeth, was initially evolved as a non-formal continuing education programme to respond to the educational and vocational training needs of adults and young people living in urban and industrial areas and for persons, who had migrated from rural to urban settings. Now, the institute's activities have been enlarged and infrastructure strengthened to enable its centres to function as district level repositories of vocational and technical skills in both urban and rural areas. At present, there are 122 Jan Shikshan Sansthans in India.

Ever since its inception, the National Literacy Mission has taken measures to strengthen its partnership with NGOs and

evolve both institutional and informal mechanisms to give voluntary organizations active promotional role in the literacy movement. Now, under the scheme of **Support to NGOs**, they are encouraged and provided with financial assistance to run post literacy and continuing education programmes in well defined areas.

In order to revitalize, re-energize and expand the role of State Resource Centres, not only is their number being increased, but their infrastructure and resource facilities are also being strengthened to enable them play the role of catalytic agents in adult education. There are 25 State Resource Centres functioning across the country. They are mainly responsible for organizing training programmes for literacy functionaries in the state and set the literacy syllabus in local languages.

**The Directorate of Adult Education :** A subordinate office |of the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy has been entrusted with the task of monitoring and evaluating various literacy programmes being launched under the aegis of the National Literacy Mission. It also provides technical and resource support to the NLM, including media support to enable it to achieve its objectives.

The National Literacy Mission has been laying great stress on vigorous monitoring and systematic evaluation of adult education programmes launched under its aegis in the country. It has developed and circulated guidelines for concurrent and final evaluation of the Total Literacy Campaigns and **Post Literacy Programmes**.

A comprehensive set of guidelines on continuing education have also been set. So far, about 281 Total Literacy Campaign districts and 91 Post Literacy districts have been evaluated by the external evaluation agencies. The district of Mandi (Himachal Pradesh) has been externally evaluated during the continuing education phase. It is hoped that the new approach of evaluating

literacy campaigns and Continuing Education Schemes will ensure complete transparency and enhance credibility of the results and impact assessments.

### **Kerala state literacy mission**

Now, it would be significant to trace the progress of the adult education movement in Kerala. Adult and non-formal education activities in Kerala began in an organised manner when P N Panicker formed the Thiruvithaamkoor Granthasala Sangham (Travancore Library Association) with 47 rural libraries. Sri Panicker brought 6000 libraries into this network. These libraries performed the role of community centres where useful discussions, seminars and symposia were held for the common public.

Later, after the formation of Kerala State in 1956, the association became Kerala Granthasala Sangham (KGS). Sri Panicker travelled across the state's villages, propagating the message of reading and invited active involvement of people. Granthasala Sangham was conferred the prestigious 'Krupsakaya Award' by UNESCO in 1975. Panicker was general secretary of the organisation till 1977, when the state government took it over its functioning.

In 1977, he established the Kerala Association for Non-formal Education and Development (KANFED). KANFED was highly instrumental in initiating the Kerala State Literacy Mission.

In 1979, the Centre sanctioned 40 literacy Centres (20 in every district) for two districts. This came about after a Project proposal to this effect was submitted by the KGS.

The Rural Functional Literacy Programme (RFLP) was initiated in five districts during 1982-83 and later extended to 11 districts.

Adult Education and Extension Education were incorporated by the National Service Schemes, Programmes of the universities

of Kerala and Calicut as part of their activities, which helped the movement in a big way.

The Total Literacy Programme, which aimed at eradication of illiteracy from Kerala, was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India on February 4, 1990.

Linguistic minorities of the state in the districts adjacent to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka were also included in the programme, after devising tailor made packages

Kerala was finally declared a totally literate state on April 8, 1991.

After achieving 'total literacy', realization dawned that there was nothing to sustain the interest in the neo literates to keep learning. To create an environment for this, the state government took up the Continuing Education Project offered by National Literacy Mission and Kerala State Literacy Mission.

The Kerala State Literacy Mission aims at Education for all and forever. Under its auspices, non-formal and life oriented education is imparted to the neo literates. Due to this, a definite curriculum and learning methodology is not adopted. The form of education for each group is finalized after studying the local culture, social peculiarities, life style and habits of the community concerned. The new knowledge acquired is meant to help neo-literates make positive contributions towards creating a better life for themselves and improving social life accordingly.

