

LITERACY AND OUR SOCIETY

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The Constitutional amendment of 1976 included education in the concurrent list. This was an important step which called for a new sharing of responsibility between the union government and the states in this vital area of national importance. "Literacy and education are reasonably good indicators of development in a society. They form an important input in the overall development of individuals enabling them to comprehend their social, political and cultural environment better and respond to it appropriately. Higher levels of education and literacy lead to a greater awareness and also contributes in improvement of economic conditions. It acts as a catalyst for social upliftment enhancing the returns on investments made in almost every aspect of development effort, be it population control, health hygiene, environmental degradation control, empowerment of women and weaker sections of the society."¹

A person, who can neither read nor write or can only read but cannot write in any language, is treated as illiterate. All children of age 6 years or less, even if going to school and have picked up reading and writing are treated as illiterate.² (Census of India, 2001) Literacy is essential for eradicating poverty and mental isolation for cultivating peaceful and friendly international relations and free democratic processes. Illiteracy, on the other hand, takes away from man his dignity, perpetuates ignorance, poverty and mental isolation and hampers social advancement, economic growth, social advancement, economic growth and political maturity.³ (Chndra, 1980). Further, literacy and level of education also influence attributes of population like fertility, morality, mobility, occupations etc. Secondly, the educational status is undoubtedly one of the best indicators of population quality as the amount and quality of schooling received by children are measures of the extent to which society is investing in the well being of future generations." (Finch & Trewarta, 1957). Education plays a crucial role in the development process and acts as a powerful instrument for social, economic and cultural transformation. It is absolutely necessary for the realization of national goal. (Singh, 1985). It is being increasingly believed that it can be a powerful means to ameliorate the suffering Harijans and for overcoming the social, physiological and economic barriers under which they have been since long. (Goyal, 1981). But the literacy level of scheduled caste population in Bihar is still very low. The Primary Census Abstract, 2001 have revealed certain illuminating facts regarding the literacy level of Bihar in general and of scheduled castes population of North Bihar in particular. National literacy rate in 2001 is 65.38% while it is 47.53% in Bihar and only 33.58% in North Bihar.⁴

Scheduled caste's literacy level in Bihar is only 19.49 percent including 30.64 male literacy and only 7.07 female literacy. Worst is the case of literacy level in scheduled castes population in North Bihar having only 15.99% including 25.75% male literacy and only 5.23% female literacy. So far as total S.C. literacy is concerned only Vaishali (12.13%) and Samastipur (10.02%) could have touched the double digit after 55 years of independence. Worst is the case of Madhubani (6.89%), Sheohar (6.71%),

Sitamarhi (6.57%), Katihar (6.45%), Purnea (6.29%), Kishanganj (5.96%) and Naugachhia Subdivision of Bhagalpur district only (5.24%). This is the case when we calculate the percentage of literate S.C. population to general literate population but when the percentage of S.C. literates is calculated out of total S.C. population of North Bihar (2001) the case becomes something different. As per this calculation the percentage of literate persons of S.C. population is (22.71%) while the male literacy is (27.71%) and female literacy is only (17.32%).

According to Moorthy, all men were equal in vedic times and there was no trace of unsociability as it is seen (Moorthy, O.K.,1975). But, later on Manu's Varma Vyavastha, viz. Brahmin, Kshtriya, Vaisya and Sudra became ascribed in the Hindu Social fabric. In course of time it vertically divided the society into: (i) upper castes, (ii) backward castes, and (iii) low castes and gave place to untouchability which ultimately divide the society. The sudras of the four fold system of Hindu society were not invariably the untouchables of India. The scheduled castes formerly known and depressed class are the fifth order of fourfold society. That is why a fifth class was created in Hindu society and it was called as "panchana Varna. These castes are known by different names, viz. 'Panchama', 'Avarna', 'chandala', etc. in the earlier literature and occupied a curiously ambiguous position in the society, excluded from the Chatur Varna scheme mentioned above.⁵

The word Harijan was coined by saint Narashinha Mehta of Gujrat for the first time and later Mahatma Gandhi popularized the word. Hindu Dharma shastra have used the nomenclature for 'Harijan's as Asprashyas, Antynjas, Antins, Polayas, etc. The Harijan lived with the Caste people of caste Hindu throughout the historical development of Indian society and were at the bottom of the tradition bound social hierarchy in Hindu society on account of their low social and ritual status these strata had been subject to a variety of disabilities under the traditional system and were treated as untouchables. Scheduled castes, popularly known as harijans are also called 'Exterior castes, depressed classes, out castes or untouchables.

Lastly, the immortal words of Lord Krishna may be quoted from SRIMADBHAGAVADGITA :

^^u fg Kkusu ln`'ka ifo=kfeg fo|rsA

rRLo;a ;ksxlafl)% dkysukRefu foUnfrAA38@4**

Verily, nothing purifies in this world, like knowledge (jñāna). He who has been perfected in Yoga fully finds it automatically and positively in the self.

^^J)kokWYyHkrs Kkua rRij% la;rsfUnz;% A

Kkua yC/ok ijka 'kkfUrefpjs.kkf/k=kPNfrAA39@4**

He who has faith and is devotee to it (i.e. knowledge) and who controls his senses, gains knowledge (wisdom) and having gained knowledge he believes the supreme peace in no time.

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