

## **TREND AND STATUS OF LITERACY IN INDIA**

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### **Abstract**

Education is the fundamental input of Economic growth with focus on balancing the issue of equity and efficiency for utilization of Economic resources. It is a vital factor that fuels both social change and economic growth. India is actively pushing forward with its agenda for revamping and restructuring education in the country. Right to Education (RTE) is now a Fundamental Right for all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years. Now the Government will be responsible for providing education to every child up to the eighth standard, free of cost, irrespective of class and gender.

This paper attempts to examine the growth of literacy in post independence period in India. I have discussed the task of the government to create proper environment and develop the infrastructure and resources to motivate the community for education, the challenges in the expansion of literacy and lastly suggested some measures to eradicate the problems of illiteracy in India.

### **Introduction**

The role of education in the process of development is very wide and critically important literacy rate is the most common accepted measure of basic education. Literacy, in census of India, is defined as the people aged 7 and above, having ability to read and write with understanding in any language ([www.Censusindia.gov.in](http://www.Censusindia.gov.in)). The UNESCO adds ability to make arithmetic calculation too. ([www.Unesco.org](http://www.Unesco.org)) In the context of globalization, education assumes greater significance. Greatness of a nation should not be measured by its ranking in global economic orders, but by its ability to provide quality education. Education must be viewed in the context of its immense potential for bringing about transformation in the quality of human life. According to the definition in the census. Any person aged seven and above who can read and write with understanding in any language is literate. According to Millennium Development Goal of United Nations, universal primary education must be achieved by the year 2015.

### **Literacy Rate Trends in India.**

The pace of progress in literacy rate as revealed by decennial census is very slow in India. In the span of fifty years from 1951 to 2001, there has been only marginal increase from 18.33 percent to 64.83 percent literacy rate in India. Between 1951 to 2001, female literacy shows a mere increase from 8.86 percent to 53.67 percent. According to census 2011, the literacy rate of India has gone up to 74.04 percent. The corresponding figures for male and females are 82.14 and 65.46 per cent respectively. Thus three-fourth of the total population aged 7 years and above is literate in the country. Four out of every five males and tow out of every three females in the country are literate.

**Table-1 : Trend of Literacy Rate in India (in%)**

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females	Gender Gap
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.3	40.4	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.95
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

**Source: : Census of India.**

Table-1 show that the country has continued its march towards improving literacy rate by recording a jumps of 9.21 percent during 2001-2011. Though the target set by Planning Commission to reduce the gender gap by 10 percent in 2011-12 has not been achieved yet the reduction by 4.99 percent has been achieved which is a positive stride towards decreasing illiteracy. Thus, it is clear that the female literacy has increased and gender gap has decreased in 2011. However, efforts are still required to achieve the target of 85 percent set by the Planning Commission to be achieved by the year 2011-12.

**Literacy Rate in States and UTs in 2011**

When we see the literacy picture of India in census 2011. We find that the ordering of the states is almost the same as it was in 2001. Kerala still continues to top the list with 93.91 per cent literacy rate whereas Bihar remains at the bottom of the ladder with 63.82 percent. Although Bihar has performed well in 2011 census compared to literacy rate in 2001 (47 percent), still it lies at the lowest rank.

**Table -2 : Ranking of States and UT's by Literacy Rate : 2011**

Rank	State/UTs#	Literacy Rate
1	Kerala	93.91
2	Lakshadweep#	92.28
3	Mizoram	91.58
4	Tripura	87.75
5	Goa	87.40
6	Daman & Diu#	87.07
7	Punducherry#	86.55
8	Chandigarh#	86.43
9	NCT of Delhi#	86.34
10	Andman & Nicobar Islands#	86.27
11	Himachal Pradesh#	83.78
12	Maharashtra#	82.91
13	Sikkim#	82.20
14	Tamil Nadu#	80.33

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15	Nagaland#	80.11
16	Manipur#	79.85
17	Uttarakhand#	79.63
18	Gujarat#	79.31
19	Dadra & Nagar Haveli#	77.65
20	West Bengal#	77.08
21	Punjab#	76.68
22	Haryana#	76.64
23	Karnataka#	75.60
24	Meghalaya#	75.48
25	Orissa#	73.45
26	Assam#	73.18
27	Chhattisgarh#	71.04
28	Madhya Pradesh#	70.63
29	Uttar Pradesh#	69.72
30	Jammu & Kashmir#	68.74
31	Andhra Pradesh#	67.66
32	Jharkhand#	67.63
33	Rajasthan#	67.06
34	Arunachal Pradesh#	66.95
35	Bihar#	63.82

**Source : Census of India 2011**

Ten States and UTs Kerala, Lakshadweep, Mizoram, Tripura, Goa, Daman & Diu, Pondicherry, Chandigarh, NCT of Delhi and Andaman & Nicobar Islands have achieved literacy rate of above 85 percent, the target set by planning Commission for the year 2011-12. But the states and UTs that lag behind the national average of 74.04 percent in literacy rates are Orissa, Assam, Chhattisgarh, M.P., U.P., J & K., Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Arunachal Pradesh and Bihar.

In the First Five Year Plan, the programme of Social Education, inclusive of literacy, was introduced as part of the Community Development Programme in 1952. The National Policy on Education in 1968 not only endorsed the recommendations of the Education Commission but also reiterated the significance of universal literacy and developing adult and continuing education as matters of priority. The formal elementary education programme was supplemented by a non-formal education system. A multi-pronged approach of universalisation of elementary education and adult literacy was adopted for achieving total literacy.

Major thrust of these programmes was on promotion of literacy among women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes particularly in the rural areas. The National Adult Education Programme (NAEP) was inaugurated on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1978. The eradication of illiteracy from a vast country like India be set with several social and economic hurdles is not an easy task. Realising this the National Literacy Mission was started on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 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 Ernakulum district of Kerala in 1990, the National Literacy Mission had accepted the literacy campaigns as the dominant strategy for eradication of illiteracy . In 1989, the district-based Total Literacy Campaign (T.L.C.) emerged as a programme strategy for the National Literacy Mission. The “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan”, a flagship programme of the Government of India was started in 2001 for achievement of universalisation of elementary education in a time bound manner, as later mandates by the 86<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution of India making free and compulsory education to children aged 6 to 14 years, as a fundamental right. Now Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is doing rounds in all the districts in most of the states for which there was huge fund allocation under 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> five year plans. In the 11<sup>th</sup> Five year plan, the Planning Commission has targeted to increase literacy rate by 85 percent and reduce the gender gap by 10 percent by 2011-12. In spite of these mission efforts by the Govt. we are still lagging behind the world literacy rate of 84 percent. Many states have shown arising trend but even then major group of states lies in average rank.

Free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years was one of the Directive Principles of State Policy intended to be implemented within ten years of the commencement of the India constitution. This directive failed to prod the Indian state to any kind of concrete action. Large sections of two generations grew up, in independent India with little or no formal education. After 60 years the Right to Education Act (RTE Act) was passed in Sept. 2009 and it came into force in the entire country from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. It is now legally enforceable for every child between the age of 6-14 years to demand free and elementary education. The RTE Act is the first legislation in the world that puts the responsibility of ensuring enrollment, attendance and compulsory education on the Government. The Act makes education a fundamental right to every child between the age of 6-14 and specifies minimum norms in elementary schools.

#### **Main Features of the RTE Act.**

- \* The Act makes it mandatory for every child between the ages of 6-14 years to be provided education by the state.
- \* Any time of the academic year, a child can go to a school and demand that this right be respected.
- \* Private educational institutions have to reserve 25 per cent of their seats for disadvantaged students starting from class I in 2011.
- \* There is a requirement of a teacher-student ratio of 1:30 at each of these schools that ought to be met within a given time frame.
- \* The schools have meet certain minimum facilities like adequate teachers playground and other infrastructure. The government will evolve some mechanism to help marginalized school comply with the provisions of the Act.
- \* The state governments and local authorities will establish primary schools within walking distance of one km of the neighbourhood.
- \* Financial burden will be shared between states and central government.
- \* There shall be a school management committee consisting of the elected representatives of the local authority, parents and guardians of children.

Thus, the RTE Act is a landmark initiative of the government of strengthen the education system in India. Under this Act, it is mandatory to provide elementary education for all children who reside in India Territory. Now education is a Fundamental Right of every Indian. The Central and State Governments are to share the financial burden for implementing the Act in the ratio of 55-45 and the Finance Commission has given Rs 25,000 crores to the states. The education sector has received considerable attention in the recent Budget 2013-14 with a significant increase of 24 percent in the total allocation for education sectors.

But the factors that contribute to the achievement of the overall goal of universalizing elementary education as a fundamental right requires action on the part of the Government. A well co-ordinated mechanism is needed for inter-sectoral collaboration and convergence. The finance department must provide adequate and appropriate financial allocations and timely releases of funds at all levels. The Public Works Department needed to re-design school premises with better facilities. Programme for water and sanitation must ensure access to adequate and safe drinking water. The problem of child labour is also a hurdle in this way. The Labour Department must align their policies with the RTE Act so that all children participate in the schooling process regularly. On the other hand, the Act would not be enough for free and compulsory education for the millions of children. It is the duty of the state, parents and guardians and the community to ensure that all children of school-going are age in School.

### **Challenges**

Education is a well accepted factor for social and economic progress and the best way of bringing social change. Soon after independence in 1947, making education available to all had become a priority for the government. Literacy is both an indicator and an instrument of development, and its attainment is a major factor behind accumulation of Human Capital. Education in general and mas literacy in particular, is a key contributor to human resource development and is thus basic to any programme of Social and Economic progress. But the problem of illiteracy is a big challenge for India and much is still to be done considering the number of out-of-school children living in rural areas.

During the last decade there has been enormous improvement in the education sector but issues like high drop-out rates, lo-levels of learning achievement and low participation of girls as well as of various systemic issues like inadequate school infrastructure, high teacher absentism, large scale teachers vacancies, poor quality of education, poorly functioning school and inadequate equipment-still remain a matter of concern in literacy scenario. The poor girls and members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes still face formidable barriers in acquiring basic education. It has been widely acknowledged that the socio-economic conditions in rural India have constrained the process of primary education and the social inequalities of caste, class and gender have been identified as the major causes of educational deprivation among children in India. The exclusion of girls and other marginalized sections of society has remained a great concern of primary education in India. It is true that the largest beneficiaries of our education system are the boys, the people of urban areas and the middle and upper classes.

The rate of literacy among the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes is very poor. They lag behind those of the other sections. A review of literacy rates among SC and ST population in comparison to that of the general population indicates a growing gap between literacy rates of these communities. Economic factors are also responsible for the low literacy rate in India. Since the people are living in poverty, it is not easy for most of them to sen their children to school. Questions of livelihood and survival, therefore, influence the choice of whether or not to send a child to school.

Children in rural areas continue to be deprived of quality education owing to factors like lack of

competent and committed teachers, lack of text books or teaching learning materials and so on. A large number of teachers refuse to teach in rural areas and those that do, are usually under-qualified.

### **Suggestions**

India has a very large elementary education system in the world and the scale of operation involved to ensure education for all in the country is unique and challenging. The nature of problems affecting the education system is so divers and often deep rooted that the solution cannot lie in the alteration of one single factor. But there are some measures which can promote the literacy particularly in the rural areas. The gender disparity in literacy is a deep rooted malady. There is a critical need to ensure gender sensitive targeting and create social consensus about the importance of female's literacy. The female literacy is the key to all aspects of development. Narrowing the gender gap in literacy is, therefore, very much necessary. The effective and cognitive efforts of parents are necessary for ensuring girls' education. So, efforts must be made to change the mindset and attitude of parents towards girls' education. The overall attitude of the people particularly that of the socially and economically backward classes towards the education of the girl child needs to be changed.

The low level of funds in education cannot help to achieve the objective of inclusive and sustainable growth. The key area which requires further investment especially in the light of the Right to Education Act, is teacher training. The act mandates all teachers need to completed and meet training. The act mandates all teachers need to complete and meet training requirements within three years of the legislation coming in force. The government should provide more fund for strengthening school infrastructure by constructing new building and upgrading the existing building. Improvement in the infrastructure like availability of water, sanitation and toilets and play-ground should get priority.

The Gram Panchayat members can also help at the primary level school in the promotion of literacy in rural areas. There should be a Panchayat Committee at the village level to see the functioning of the School. The committee will monitor the enrolment and absenteeism of children. The committee members will contract those parents who are not sending their children to the school. Parents and teachers meet should be organized to enhance children's enrolment and attendance.

The Mid-day meal programme has attracted the children of poor families. But the quality of the meal needs to be improved. It will attract children of the weaker sections of the society to the school. Schools that are closer to the village and easily accessible are likely to attract more students and also. Retain them. The school timings should also not clash with the work schedules for different seasons.

Though the state has the primary obligation to provide education for all children but non-governmental organizations and other civil society partners can make a vital contribution to achieve the goal of hundred percent literacy. So, the government needs to build effective partnerships with all key organizations and institutions that have an impact on literacy. This will help build a new perspective on inclusiveness, encompassing gender and social inclusion, A vibrant civil society movement can ensure that the rights of the child are not violated, it can amplify the voice of the disadvantaged and weaker sections of society. It can also improve programme outcomes by contributing local knowledge and technical expertise and bringing innovative ideas and solutions to the challenges ahead.

## **Conclusion**

In spite of these massive efforts by the Government, we are still lagging behind the would literacy rate of 84 percent. Many states have shown a rising trend but even then major group of states lie below the national at average of 74.04 according to census 2011. But stride towards a completely literate India has become surer and more confident.

The progress that the country has made during the last sixty years has been remarkable. The country of villages is viewed entirely different from what it was sixty years ago. But despite the efforts made, the goal of hundred percent literacy is far away. The literacy increased from 18.4 percent in 1951 to 74.04 percent in 2011 as per 2011 census.

However, there is a need to look at the entire set of problems and deal with the issue holistically taking into consideration the specific context of different sections of the society. It will also require a constant and strong central support for policy, strategy, technical assistance, and monitoring and evaluation combined with increased decentralization within government.

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