

GROWTH AND REGIONAL INEQUALITY IN LITERACY IN INDIA

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PROLOGUE

Literacy is a very broad concept, it is not just simple reading of the words, symbols and sounds but it is the understanding of the world; it is an extension of an individual towards education, including all the kinds of interdisciplinary solutions to the problems. Literacy leads to education and an empowerment of an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities; individual tends to utilize his skills and knowledge in a productive manner for the growth and enhancement of oneself and the community. Throughout India, still numbers of people are illiterate and there is an interconnection between poverty and illiteracy; they are considered to be the part of the complex system of deprivation and discrimination. When the literacy programs and schemes are organized and formulated in a manner that aims at poverty eradication then even the economically backward segments of the society develop an interest in literacy (Training Manual, n.d.). Literacy is stated to be the agent of social change. Poverty is said to be closely related to the levels of schooling that the individual has obtained. The earning capacity is endowed within an individual on the basis of the level of education that he has attained. People who are illiterate or who have not acquired much education do dwell in the conditions of poverty, and people who are well educated do enable to find job opportunities for themselves. People suffer from poverty due to poor investment amongst themselves and they lack the funds for human capital investment (Causes of poverty, 2012).

Growth of literacy in India would always lead to a positive impact in all ways; literacy is one of the most imperative solutions to all the economic, social, cultural, political and societal problems. Higher levels of literacy lead to better attainment of health, nutritional requirements, economic growth, population control, empowerment of women and the weaker sections of the society and making provision for their employability. Literacy can be achieved through adult literacy classes or through a non-formal educational system. A person who can read but cannot write is not treated as a literate, people who are blind but read Braille are treated as literates and children of age six or less who go to school are treated as illiterates. In the censuses up to the year 1981, it was expected to devise the rate of literacy, taking into account the total population. The literacy rate is more consequential if the sub-population in the age group of 0-6 years is excluded from the total population, it was decided in 1991 census to use the term literacy rate only for the population aging between seven years and above. The same concept has continued in censuses of 2001 and 2011 (Status of Literacy, 2011).

GROWTH OF LITERACY

There has been growth in literacy in India from 5.35 percent in the beginning of the century to 36.23 percent in 1981; the numbers of illiterates in 1981 were double the number of illiterates in 1901. The main reason behind the growth of illiterates was the rapid growth of the population. The growth has been analyzed during the pre and the post independence period, and the findings have been stated as follows: (Tilak, 2014).

1. The annual growth rate of population increased from 1.22 percent during 1921-1951 to 2.16 percent during 1951-1981.
2. The post-independence period had more number of illiterates as compared to the pre-independence period; 1.25 percent in 1951-1981 and 0.85 percent from 1921-1951.
3. There has been a growth in the literate population and the percentages were 4.11 in 1921-1951 and 4.83 during 1951-1981.
4. The annual rate of growth of the literate population was the highest in 1931-1941, which was 6.83%.

There has been a decline in the growth of literacy rates during the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945); when India achieved its independence in the year 1947 then there was establishment of educational institutions in rural and urban areas which lead to rise in the rates of literacy (Tilak, 2014).

LITERACY AND THE ECONOMIC GROWTH

For socio-economic growth, literacy is always considered to be an imperative aspect. Economic development of the country directly depends upon economic and human resources; human resources include the population, its growth rate, skills, standard of living and the working capacity of the labor force. All these factors can be developed amongst the human resources by increasing the literacy rate, thus literacy rate plays a key role in the economic growth of the country. Japan is an example of an economy that developed due to excelling of human resources despite the deficiency in natural resources. India is a densely populated country and has a large number of human resources; it is vital to increase the rate of literacy amongst the human resources because it is the educated personnel in every organization, society, district or the entire nation that would wholeheartedly contribute towards the goodwill and expansion. Therefore, it can be stated that literacy plays a crucial role in determining India's progress. Better educational opportunities and increase in the rate of literacy would lead to higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as human capital is an important cause of growth and higher GDP per capita will lead to better education due to more investment in education. Thus, there are sufficient facts to suggest that increasing education levels of people will lead to an advanced growth of the economy (Desai, 2012).

Adult Literacy in 15+ Age Group

Significant improvements in the rate of literacy appeared difficult to analyze, then the literacy rate began to be looked amongst age group of individuals who are 15+. The rate of adult literacy increased from 19.3 percent in 1951 to 40.8 percent in 1981; during the same period, there has been an increase in the number of illiterates from 174 million to 245 million. The rate of growth of adult literates was the highest during 1951-1961 (5.67%) and it declined to 4.18 percent during 1961-1971 and marginally increased during 1971-1981 to 4.55 per cent. The National Adult Education Program (NAEP) has not depicted any considerable results (Tilak, 2014).

REGIONAL INEQUALITY IN LITERACY IN INDIA

In India, there has been regional inequality between the states, and between rural and urban areas; inequalities have been with regards to income, consumption, education and health. In regards to previous studies, inequalities of average incomes and consumption between urban and rural areas and between states have been increasing in recent years. This is mainly due to an increase in income in both rural and urban sectors. At the same time, persons in the lower deciles have continued to make unpretentious profits. The consequences were that poverty and infant mortality rates decreased in both rural and urban sectors and literacy continues to increase. Certainly, urban-rural gaps in most of the indicators applicable to the underprivileged are lessening, and the states with the worst initial conditions have made the most progress, especially when measured over longer periods of time. Thus, while inequality among individuals is recently on the rise, most indicators of regional inequality among the poor suggest movement toward union (Young & Kathuria, 2009).

India had more number of illiterates in 1971 than in 1961. In accordance with the 1971 census there were 387 million illiterates within the country. There has been an increase in the rate of literacy from 16.6 in 1951 to 23.9 in 1961, to 29.3 in 1971; with an increase in the growth of population, there has been a growth in the number of illiterates. The Education Commission (1964-66) headed by D.S Kothari pointed out that illiteracy always leads to negativities and always proves to be detrimental. An uneducated person has low prospects of a reasonable income; he remains isolated from the social procedures, such as democratic government and commercial marketing. Illiteracy as it is in large scale, blocks economic and social progress; affects economic productivity, population control, national integration and security, improvement in health and sanitation, employability of individuals and will lead to increase in poverty and overpopulation within the country (Tilak, 2014).

The concept of literacy always has positive impact upon the nation's progress, socially, economically, politically and so forth. India is an agrarian economy, in this economy the rate of illiteracy will hamper the country's progress to much extent; on the other hand, literacy is a very

essential requirement for the rejuvenation of agriculture. Literacy provides with adaptableness to changes and transformations, to modern forms of life and makes an individual familiar with innovativeness and scientific techniques either in social and economic and discharges an individual from the conventional and unscientific network. In India, literacy is proved to have a significant influence on the agricultural yield. In India, the social rate of return to literacy is estimated to be 15.9 times greater than the return to illiteracy; in some states the rate of literacy, is low, whereas in some states it is high (Tilak, 2014).

Disparities in the rates of literacy of different regions can be attributed to several qualitative and quantitative factors. In all the states there are differences in the economic development, social and demographic characteristics, historical heritage, administrative potential, government norms, political effectiveness, and public policies are organized in a different manner; all these features account for the salient inequalities in the rates of literacy. Another important feature that is a must to be taken under consideration is establishment of schools and other educational institutions; schools which are located at a distance and are not easily accessible to the students, do not enable them to attain educational qualifications. Therefore, this is also a point which leads to disparities in the rates of literacy (Tilak, 2014).

HOW ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IN INDIAN EXACERBATE POVERTY OR THE CASE FOR RENEWED LITERACY PROGRAMS IN INDIA

Poverty and unemployment problems are the main hindrances toward the country's economic growth; a proper framework needs to be established in order to solve these problems. The individuals who dwell in the conditions of poverty will not develop interest in reading, writing and arithmetic which are a must to be a literate; hence it can be stated that poverty is a life crippling condition. In the present world, the concept of computer literacy is prevailing throughout the country which is acceptable; India is still considered to be a third world country, NGOs have found that technology is not considered to be a problem within the country, but the major problem that is prevalent is that people cannot read nor write. Within the rural areas, making provision of computers and electricity is achievable; if the rural masses are educated about the reading and writing concepts, how to use a computer to type, how to browse the internet, then certainly they will get released from the conditions of poverty and unemployment. Absence of technology or educational institutions will enable them to dwell in the conditions of poverty; illiteracy will be prevalent and would prove to be a biggest impediment in their upward mobility (Jaitly, 2012).

PROGRAMS LEADING TO GROWTH IN LITERACY

The National Literacy Mission (NLM) is a policy strategy, launched in 1988, with the main motive of imparting functional literacy to 80 million illiterate persons in 15-35 age group –

30 million by 1990 and the additional 50 million was by the year 1995. The focus of NLM was on rural areas, particularly women and persons belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Through NLM, methodical attempts were made to ensure participation of the people through the means of media and communication, creation of local level participatory structures, taking out of jathas (processions) and training and development of youth and women even in other areas such as paintings, art, candle making and so forth. Diverse methods are employed for the identification of suitable voluntary agencies, procedures of financial assistance; voluntary agencies are also involved on an enormous scale for the spread of the program, training, technical resource development, experimentation and innovation (Singh, 2002).

The Mass Program for Functional Literacy (MPFL) was expanded and strengthened and a mass movement for literacy launched by involving educational institutions, teachers, students, youth, military and paramilitary personnel, housewives, ex-servicemen employers and trade unions. Systems and organizations for post literacy and continuing education have been established throughout the country, particularly through the institutions called Jan Shikshan Nilayams. The structure of technical resource development at the national, state and district levels ensures that the material and the content is of enhanced quality and the mission of the organization gets achieved in a fulfilling manner. By 1990, facilities for literacy learning, continuing education and vocational training were extended to all parts of the country. The NLM includes development, transfer and application of technical and pedagogic inputs in several districts, backed by an effective Mission Management System to ensure achievement of the mission objectives. This comprises of procedures for suitable staff selection and development, collection flow and utilization of information, systematic monitoring and mid-course corrections (Singh, 2002).

The total literacy campaign model has been the dominant strategy for abolition of adult illiteracy in India since 1990s. These campaigns are area-specific, time-bound, volunteer-based, lucrative and result oriented. The drive is on attainment of functional literacy through prescribed forms of literacy and numeracy. The learner is the focal point in the entire process and measurement of learning product is continuous, informal, participative and non-threatening. This campaign is involved in identifying the non-literate people through conducting a detailed survey. It contributes largely in the building of an environment where mass mobilization takes place through communication strategies and other cultural programs such as street plays, divine singing, foot march, literacy walls etc. It is concerned with the development of teaching-learning materials and these are based on an innovative pedagogy known as Improved Pace and Content of Learning (IPCL) that incorporates motivation oriented teaching-learning materials. Training is conducted through the key resource persons and master trainers. There is one master trainer for every 25-30 volunteer teachers and one key resource person for every 25-30 master trainers (Singh, 2002).

Jan Shikshan Sansthan is a program that caters to the educational and vocational needs and requirements of young individuals and the adults residing in urban and industrial areas and the persons who have migrated from rural to urban settings. These sansthans impart life skills through education and create awareness to broaden the knowledge and information of individuals to improve organizational structures through the vocational training programs. In the recent past the focus of these sansthans is shifting from the industrial workers in urban areas to neo-literates, unskilled workers and unemployed youth throughout the country (Singh, 2002).

The Jan Shikshan Sansthans are set up under the sponsorship of non-government organizations. These institutions need to get registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1960 and therefore, they enjoy a considerable degree of independence. The Government of India provides financial assistance to these sansthans, it does not make any kind of interference in the activities of the sansthans but monitors their performance and makes sure that the funds they grant to these organizations are utilized in accordance with the guidelines of the government (Singh, 2002).

DISCUSSION

In India, there have been establishment of norms, policies, programs and institutions which have contributed towards the growth of literacy. In rural areas, too there have been provisions of technology which have imbibed computer skills amongst the rural masses. In some of the rural areas, still there is illiteracy which means that people are unable to read and write but the programs and norms have been formed so that they can acquire literacy. NLM, Jan Shikshan Sansthan, MPFL, TLCs are some of the programs which aim to spread the literacy skills amongst the masses. Problems of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and overpopulation are considered to be the main malevolence that would always cause obstacles in the path of country's development and progress. India is an agrarian economy and 65% of the country's population resides in rural areas; therefore, it is vital that the individuals who are employed in agricultural activities do acquire some knowledge and skills so that they can perform their work duties well. These may be small or marginal farmers and they are mostly not literate and due to this they suffer problems, hence in order to yield productivity it is vital for the rural masses to develop literacy skills.

India is a diverse nationality with different cultures, norms, customs, religions, if an individual is not literate then he would encounter many problems and will not be able to live his life adequately, hence in a densely populated and in a country with diverse backgrounds and religions it is essential to formulate policies and programs that would move towards spreading the overall literacy skills. Any individual who is able to read and write would be considered as a literate.

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