

Discussion On

Accelerating rural literacy with special emphasis on Women, SC, ST's & Minorities through Adult Education and National Open Schooling System

Literacy is an integral and indispensable element of educational development. Literacy can pave way for reduction in population growth, child mortality and poverty, and facilitate in attaining gender parity, sustainable and holistic growth. It provides for nurturance of democratic values and peace among people. Literacy is all the more important to those sections of population, who have been historically neglected. Achieving universal adult literacy is a fundamental goal of adult and continuing education programmes that have been envisaged from time to time.

The 2011 Census have revealed that despite an impressive decadal increase of 9.2 percent points in literacy, national literacy levels have risen to no more than 74.1 percent (from 64.8 percent in 2001). The 2011 Census has shown that female literacy has increased much more than male literacy. While male literacy rate increased by 6.86 percent points from 75.26 percent in 2001 to 82.14 in 2011, the female literacy increased by 11.79 percent points from 53.67 to 65.46 percent during the same period. The gender gap which was 21.6 percent points in 2001 has receded to 16.7. Yet the gender gap still remains much above the targeted 10 percent points. Thus, even today the Plan Targets have not been achieved: overall literacy rate being short by five percent points, gender gap yet to be reduced by another 6.7 percent points and social and regional disparities still persisting.

Adult education is indispensable as it supplements the efforts to enhance and sustain literacy levels through formal education. 'Saakshar Bharat' has been devised as the new variant of National Literacy Mission. The scheme seeks to further promote and strengthen Adult Education, specially of women, by extending educational opportunities to those adults who lack access to formal education and have crossed the standard age for receiving such education, now feel a need for learning of any type, including, literacy, basic education (equivalency to formal education), vocational education (skill development), physical and emotional development, practical arts, applied science, sports, and recreation. The scheme has been formulated with the objective of achieving 80% literacy level by 2012 at national level, by focusing on adult women literacy seeking – to reduce the gap between male and female literacy to not more than 10 percentage points.

Though there have been significant gains in literacy rates, large gender, social and regional disparities in literacy levels persist. The gains in literacy levels are due to success of the adult education programmes and improvements in primary schooling. However, there is a further need to enhance the literacy levels of the socially marginalized groups and those living in rural areas through interventions of adult education programmes and open schooling systems. What are the impediments in implementing literacy programmes at village, block and district levels

- Is it more difficult to implement adult literacy programmes in urban dwellings such as slums?
- What are the reasons why the literacy programmes are unable to reach the socially deprived sections as much as desired?

- What other strategies can be employed to achieve faster progress in reducing the existing disparities in literacy levels.
- Should the Open School Systems reach out in a larger way, to adult illiteracy?
- Can school students be harnessed to spread the literacy programme?
- How can we integrate specific skills component in the adult literacy programme plus engage with national livelihood programmes?
- What are the impediments in implementing literacy programmes at village, block and district levels?