

Adult Education and Social Transformation of Rural India

Dr. Ameer Sultana,

Assistant Professor, Department Cum Centre for Women's Studies and Development,
Panjab university, Chandigarh, India.

Abstract

Adult education is a prerequisite for any nation, so as to have educated and well-equipped generations to come. It is also essential for achieving compulsory universal primary education for children. The present study is a modest attempt to study the implementation of Adult Education Programme in India. The basic objective of the study is to explore whether this programme has been able to bring any social transformation in the society. The study is based on the secondary sources. The study concludes with the remark that though, the achievement of social transformation is there but the process is slow. In order to get more benefits from the programme efforts has to be made for its effective implementation.

*

"No nation can leave its security only to the police and the army, to a large extent national security depends upon the education of citizens, their knowledge of affairs, their character and sense of discipline and their ability to participate effectively in security measure."

Kothari Commission.

Literacy is a fundamental human right of every person. Literacy is the heart of basic education. It is literacy which provides opportunities to get education, which is a prerequisite for the self-empowerment and a means for social and human development. It will not be incorrect to say that the investment in education is considered as the best investment as it provides more opportunities for making better and informed choices in life, which is again an important indicator of human development. Education and human development are interlinked and complimentary to each other, one cannot be attained without the other. This has been well documented in the First Human Development Report of 1990 which asserts that the 'people are the real wealth of the nation.' Moreover,

development in its true sense cannot be attained without having a scientific temperament, which is only possible with the education particularly in a democratic country like ours.

Democracy can only be meaningful only when its population is conscious and play an effective role in its deliberations and particularly in public policy matters. Cognisant to this fact, the Constitution of India under the Directive Principles of State Policy in its Article 45 have directed that, “the states shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.” Although, many efforts have been initiated for universalisation of elementary education by 1960, yet it is still far away from achieving. No doubt, throughout this period, significant efforts have been made by government and other agencies to provide compulsory elementary education to all children up to the age of 14 years, along with the efforts which were made to increase the rate of literacy in India. At the time of independence literacy rate of India was just 16 per cent.¹ There is a manifold increase in the literacy rate from 1951 to 2011 that is from 16 per cent to 74 per cent,² yet a large proportion of the Indian population continues to have little or no education, and this proportion is much higher for females than males. Among the population age six and over, 42 per cent of females and 22 per cent of males have never attended school, and 18 per cent of females and 21 per cent of males have less than 5 years of completed education.³

One such remarkable effort in this direction is the 86th Constitutional Amendment (2002) making education a Fundamental Right under Article 21A of the Constitution of India. The right to education received considerable impetus during the last decade as a result there is a significant increase in the percentage of enrolment at the elementary school level and at the subsequent stages, and there is a remarkable achievement in this direction,

It will be relevant to mention here that for the effective functioning of democracy and to achieve sustainable development, making elementary education compulsory will not solve the problem. In spite of many efforts to eliminate illiteracy, even now a large section of adult population from economically and socially marginalised section is illiterate. Hence, there is a need to pay equal attention to provide adult education

programmes for illiterate adults. Adult education is not only a prerequisite for any nation, so as to have educated and well-equipped generations to come. It is also essential for achieving compulsory universal primary education for children. Before going for further discussion, it will be relevant to know what adult education is and why is it important? What role it can play in the society.

Adult education basically refers to the education of grown-up persons who are above eighteen years of age. It is the education for adults mainly those who could not get any formal education in the early years of their lives. Bryson, defines “Adult education includes all activities with an educational purpose, carried on by people, in the ordinary business of life who use only part of their energy to acquire intellectual equipment”⁴

In a similar manner, Ernst Baker opines “Adult education is given on a part-time basis and, therefore, given concurrently with work and the earning of a living.”⁵

Indian scholars have gone a step further and opine that adult education is not only to impart functional literacy but also viewed it as a means for social transformation of society. This is clearly evident from the views of Swami Vivekananda, who while expressing the need and importance of adult education remarked, “So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor, who having been educated at their expense, pays not the heed to them. Our great natural sin is the neglect of the masses and that is the cause of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses are well educated, well fed and well cared for.”⁶

It is further mentioned that the National development and reconstruction is closely allied to Adult Education. Likewise, Maulana Azad described adult education in terms for preparing every citizen to play his or her role effectively in a democratic social order. So, he renamed adult education as 'Social Education'.⁷

Kothari Commission reports that “Adult education is to provide every adult citizen with an opportunity for education of type which he wishes and which he should have for his personal enrichment, professional advancement and effective participation in social and political life.”⁸

In brief, adult education in India has been defined and regarded as a vital instrument for socioeconomic and political change in the country. It is envisioned as the foundation of any democracy which is based on its vigilant citizens, particularly for those adults who were not fortunate enough to get school education during their childhood.

Moreover, India opted for a democratic and socialist political system, which requires knowledgeable and educated citizens, who can become the efficient agents for achieving the goals of equality, justice and can contribute effectively in good governance in order to achieve sustainable development of the nation. To accomplish these goals, one of the major tasks before independent India was to combat illiteracy, as a large section of Indian population is illiterate at the time of independence. Therefore, Government of India launched National Adult Education Programme on October 2, 1978, with a major intention to provide non- formal education to adult illiterates.

In the subsequent years, the Government of India has integrated various adult literacy programs under National Adult Education Programme and in 1988 the National Literacy Mission was set up to monitor the programme. Accordingly, nationwide adult education programme was implemented by well-organized machinery with the aim of eliminating illiteracy, on priority basis to target socially backward classes, tribes and women. The prime objective is to teach them basic skills of reading, writing, counting and simple arithmetic along with awareness generation.⁹

Through awareness generation care was taken to enhance their skills so required in day-to-day life with a view to promote efficiency of neo-literates. The Report of Education Commission, further reveals that the social awareness component was aimed at knowing, understanding and taking action on issues which affect the individual, the community and the society, so as to improve their quality of life.

Accordingly, greater emphasis has been laid on Adult Education in the Seventh Five-Year Plan, particularly in the 20-point Programme of the then Prime Minister who makes a special mention of stimulating adult literacy. Several campaigns were initiated such as Community Development Programs and *Sarva Shiksha Mohim*, for spreading literacy.

Social Transformation through Adult Education:

It is now more than three Decades of the implementations of adult education programme in India. It has impacted our society in a multifarious way. Many studies have been conducted to evaluate the programme and its implementation. But hardly any effort is made to study the impact of adult education on the social transformation of the society. In the absence of any statistical data, and on the basis of secondary sources and personal observations, a modest attempt is made to study the social transformation of society that has been brought through adult education in India, which is as follows.

The adult education in India has been playing a vital role in bringing social transformation particularly in the rural society by diluting the patriarchal ethos. Neo-literate head of the family have realised that education is a pre-requisite in order to progress and bring fundamental changes in the society. This has changed his perspective and as a visionary he starts sending his children to school including girls. This is evident by two facts, one - the number of enrolments in schools have been substantially increasing year by year. Secondly, we have an example of Ernakulum District where total literacy campaign was held with full zeal, and subsequently spread over the whole state, consequently, Kerala became the first state in the country to have a distinction of having total literacy in 1990.

Adult education also provided technical training, professional and vocational competence to make their lives better. **Farmers' Functional Literacy Projects** was one such initiative as a part of the Green Revolution with the objective of making farmers functionally literate in high yielding cultivation areas. The three components of this programme were: functional literacy, farmers' training and radio programmes for the farmers such as *Kissan Bhayu ke Leye*. This has brought substantial transformation in the lives of farmers. They became more knowledgeable, used their skills properly to yield more and thereby improved the living standards of their families.

Likewise, the National Adult Education Programme has brought a great change among the neo-literate villagers. They have started reading newspaper and listening to radio. Their access to information has increased which has resulted in a higher level of awareness. They started getting knowledge about plans and programmes of the government/s. They were now getting the information about the programmes and manifestos of political parties and

their leaders. They became well informed and learned voters, this can be experienced in the increasing number of voters in the subsequent general elections to the Parliament and other legislative bodies, which ultimately resulted in strengthening the foundations of democracy in India.

By learning simple arithmetic, the adults have not only started taking care of their finances themselves, but also gained the knowledge to operate their bank accounts. Furthermore, villagers have started getting benefited from Kisan Credit Card facility, which saved them from the exploitation by the local moneylenders and made a dent in the vicious circle of conventional forced labour and poverty.

In addition to this, higher literacy has accelerated the development process of the nation, as there are ample evidences which have established a significant correlation between literacy and various indications of development, such as health, economic prosperity, high per capita income, low infant mortality rate, low incidence of violence, and higher utilization of available resources.

The Human Development in South Asia Report 2000 further reveals that where the recipients of this programme are women, there is a substantial decline in the fertility rate, maternal mortality and infant mortality rate, increase in the incidences of pre-natal, post-natal and neo-natal care, immunization, benefits from ICDP programmes and use of contraceptives.

Moreover, after acquiring adult education, the changes in the status of women become more visible. They become more conscious of their rights, and their access to information has also increased. Consequently, there is mushrooming of *Mahila Mandals* took place, and many women have formed DWCRA and self-help groups, and received micro-finances to start small scale enterprises to supplement their family income. Not only this, the adult literacy classes have also given a boost to their confidence and organizational level. The programme gave strength to women to fight against social evils and to protect their rights. One big example of this is the Anti-liquor movement of Nellore District of Andhra Pradesh which spread like fire not only in the state but also in the neighboring states. It is also significant to make mention of some of the movements which witness a large participation of women such as anti-dowry movements, movements against custodial

rape, chipko and other environmental movements, sati movements etc. during late 1970s and 1980s.

Like any other programme, this programme has also some constraints, such as in terms of infrastructure, human resources, implementation and monitoring mechanism. It is also true that it an uphill task to cater to such a vast and culturally diverse illiterate population of India.

Notwithstanding, these constraints, the adult literacy programme has been successfully implemented in various parts of the country. Millions of adults have received this education and brought a social transformation in the society by having a better control over their lives and resources.

To sum up, the scheme is the need of the time with such defined objectives.

To maximize its benefits, it has to be implemented in an effective manner all over the country. It is significant to realise that the efforts that are being made for universalisation of elementary education will not bear fruits unless it is implemented with a political will to achieve it, which requires a comprehensive approach by adopting new techniques with effective implementation and monitory mechanism, so that social transformation can be achieved with a faster pace.

Notes

- ¹ Census of India, 1950, Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Available at <https://censusindia.gov.in>
- ² Census of India, 2011, Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Available at <https://censusindia.gov.in>
- ³ NFHS -3, 2005, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GoI and International Institute of Population Science, Mumbai, Maharashtra. Available at <http://rchiip.org>nfhs>nfhs3>.
- ⁴ http://www.india.gov.in/citizen/adult_education.php, viewed on 3rd March 2012.
- ⁵ http://www.india.gov.in/citizen/adult_education.php, viewed on 3rd March 2012
- ⁶ Essay on the importance of **Adult-Education** in India, www.preservearticles.com/.../importance-of-adult-education-in-india.html, view on March 23, 2012
- ⁷ Kaur Gurmeet, Adult Education – Its Impact on India’s Development, e-paper.earlytimes.in. viewed on 4th March 2012.
- ⁸ Kothari, D.S., *Education Commission Report*, Government of India, New Delhi, 1966.
- ⁹ Ibid

References

- Census of India, 2011, Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Available at <https://censusindia.gov.in>
- NFHS -2, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GoI and International Institute of Population Science, Mumbai, Maharashtra. Available at <http://rchiip.org>nfhs>nfhs2>.
- NFHS -3, 2005, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, GoI and International Institute of Population Science, Mumbai, Maharashtra. Available at <http://rchiip.org>nfhs>nfhs3>.
- Paintal Manjeet, **Adult Education** In India, Indonesia, Thailand And China - A Comparative Study, **education**.puchd.ac.in/show-theses.php –
- Sahasrabudhe Anuradha, Failure of Women’s Adult Education in India – Some Socio- Cultural constrains and possible remedial Measures, <http://www.lifelongadultlearning.org.adult.....>, downloaded on 18.5.2011
- The Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre, 2000, Human Development in South Asia 2000: The Gender Question, Oxford University Press
- UNDP, 1990, Human Development Report 1990, oxford University Press

