

Education for All: Literacy Rate in India - A Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper intends to study the India's efforts in reflecting the multi-dimensional economic and social objectives of inclusive growth through brining reforms in the educational sector via 11th five year plan of India. The study begins with ancient Indian approach towards inclusive growth and few ideologies of Mahatma Gandhi and John F Kennedy towards inclusion and its relativity with development. The paper provides a brief on inclusive growth and 11th five year plan. The paper goes on to analyse the importance of inclusive education and targets adapted towards attainment of inclusive education in 11th Five Year Plan. The paper discusses some of the flag ship programs and policies which were on the main agenda for creating an unbiased education structure and system. The paper focuses on one of the educational targets of 11th five year plan "Increase literacy rate for persons of age 7 years or more to 85% by 2011-12" and attempts to study the policies and programs which were designed and drafted to achieve this target. The paper evaluates the performance with the target and tries to identify the reasons for the gap. The paper concludes with some suggestions on achieving the objective of "Education for All".

Keywords: Literacy rate; Education; EFYP; Education inclusion; Literacy programs.

1.0 Introduction

*'Om SarveshaamSvastir-Bhavatu |SarveshaamShaantir-Bhavatu |
SarveshaamPurnnam-Bhavatu |SarveshaamMangalam-Bhavatu |
Om SarveBhavantuSukhinah, SarveSantuNir-Aamayaah |
SarveBhadraanniPashyant, MaaKashcid-Duhkha-Bhaag-Bhavet |
Om ShaantihShaantihShaantih ||'*

This sloka from veda exhibits the approach of India towards sustainable economic development since ages and has always lived with the principles and philosophy of "Everyone's Welfare". Our epics and culture strongly propaganda that

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success, growth and development of an economy and society is always a collective and holistic approach. Thus Inclusive growth in India was not an approach or strategy but was a Way of Living. Mahatma Gandhi and John F Kennedy said that for a nation to grow and develop they cannot ignore the unprivileged and poor, the success path for nations passes through the hinder lands of rural areas.

The issues to be addressed in this research are that the economic growth or GDP growth alone does not assure the real growth of a nation. The nations which witnessed economic growth have bypassed the underprivileged sections of their society and this has paved way for numerous inequality issues like income, standard of living, employment, education etc. Thus there is a need to reduce this gap of inequality and embrace the complete and overall development through inclusive approach.

Inclusive growth is a term which is being coined frequently on many economic platforms in recent past. Inclusive growth or pro-poor growth is defined as an economic development process which includes all the sections of the society especially the weaker sections or excluded groups and benefit every individual across sectors. It emphasizes on providing equal opportunity for education, health, career, employment, safety, standard of living and social inclusion etc of the deprived and focus on improving their standard of living. It aims in participation of all the people into the development of the nation and collectively harvests the fruits of this development. Rapid growth of economy with inclusive growth approach would craft an unprejudiced economic state in the country (Essays UK, 2013).

India also witnessed the same phenomena when the economy boosted and accelerated with 7.7% GDP in tenth five year plan and making it the fastest growing economy in the world. But an introspective analysis depicted that the rapid growth in GDP did not include all the groups and sections of the society. Income, gender, social inequalities prevailed in the economy and structural reframing of the economy and society was an essential element for long run growth and development. Employment, poverty, women status, infra structure, quality of life of minorities, literacy, mortality etc were performing at a very slow rate of improvement. Regional imbalance also stated a sorry figure requiring significant development. These depict that while India was happily embracing its rapid economic growth and celebrating 72nd year of its independence, it was still far away from Pandit Jawaharlal's pledge of Tryst with Destiny, "To bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India; to fight and end poverty and ignorance, disease and inequality of opportunity" (Tryst with Destiny - Jawaharlal Nehru, 1947)

Thus India adopted this approach in its The Eleventh five year plan (2007-2012) under the leadership of Prime Minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh who drafted the plan with

an objective to address these deficiencies of previous plans and thus emphasized the importance of inclusive growth which provides a quality life to the poor, minority, women etc thus initiating diverse plans and programs for their development. The theme "towards faster and more inclusive growth" promoted for sustainable and balanced growth of economy by connecting the dots between economic growth and inclusion. The plan focused designing and implementing programs and schemes on economic growth with reduction in poverty, creating employment opportunities, providing health and education facilities for deprived and poor, equality of opportunity, skill development, improving women status and improvement in governance. (Inclusive Growth Eleventh Planning Commission)

Education sector is a crucial part of any economy. An educated labour force is significant for realizing faster growth and education is also the key to ensure greater inclusivity. The grave challenges of our economy like unemployment, underemployment, poverty etc can be addressed effectively through education. The 11th five year plan brought out the immediate need to address the quality, infrastructure and skills issues in education. A proposal to set up National Skill Development Mission was also made. Five targets were set for education in this plan, they are:

- Reduction in the dropout rates of children at the elementary level from 52.2% in 2003–04 to 20% by 2011–12.
- Developing minimum standards of educational attainment in elementary schools, to ensure quality education.
- Increasing the literacy rate for persons of age 7 years or more to 85% by 2011–12
- Reducing the gender gap in literacy to 10 percentage points by 2011–12.
- Increasing the percentage of each cohort going to higher education from the present 10% to 15% by 2011–12.

2.0 Research Methodology

The paper is a conceptual paper and the secondary data is collected from various national and international reports, research papers and articles. The main sources of data is Government of India reports on 11th Five Year Plan, Inclusive Growth report, Review of EFYP, UNESCO report on Literacy and few research papers on inclusive education and literacy in India.

2.1 Problem statement

The 11th five year plan of India which focused on attaining inclusive growth and development had many objectives to attain this goal. Programs and policies were framed

in all sectors and areas to achieve inclusive growth. Education system also comprised of few targets to bring equal opportunities to all the citizens of India.

The problem to be addressed in this research is to study one of the targets of education: “Increase literacy rate for persons of age 7 years or more to 85% by 2011-12” and comparing the results with the targets set.

3.0 Objectives of the Research

- To study the policy framework adopted by the government in achieving this target.
- To measure the performance against the target.
- To study the factors contributing to the achievement/ non-achievement of the target.

4.0 Literature Review

India is the second most populated country in the world and accounts for 18% of the world population. With a population of 1.32 Billion (51.8 % of Male and 48.2% Female) and growth rate of 1.08% India will be the most populated country in the world surpassing China by 2020. More than 50% of the population is below the age of 25 and more than 65% of the population is below the age of 35 years (Government of India Report, 2009) The average age of India is 29 years and the youngest country in the world. This depicts India’s strength in terms of demographic dividend, but this can become demographic disaster if serious issues like lack of education and illiteracy are not addressed. Literacy can be an effective tool to address the grave issues of India. Literacy rate is one of the key parameter of measurement of economic progress of a country, as literacy provides employment opportunities a better standard of living and an intellectual and matured society. This also contributes in decrease in population growth and better sharing of resources among the people. Literacy is defined as a person who is aged seven or above; who can both read and write with understanding in any language is treated as called a literate. India’s literacy rate as per 2011 census is 74.04%, Kerala being the highest with 93.92% and Bihar the least with 63.82%. In gender analysis the female literacy rate is 65.46% compared to Men with 82.14%. India measures 72.1% in adult literacy and 86.1% in youth literacy rate (age 15-24) against world average of 86.3 % and 91.2% (2015 data by UNESCO). India’s literacy rate during the time independence was 14% and efforts were made to increase the rate but the pace was very slow. 11th five year plan had come up with various targets and initiatives to improve the literacy rate of India. The Governmental measures did not work effectively due to the administrative constraints in the system. The target of achieving 85% literacy was not

conceptualized due to the non active participation of state governments, weak management and supervision for implementation of the scheme like National Literacy Mission which was framed to achieve this target (UNDP Report, 2011)

5.0 Policies and Programs for Literacy

National Literacy Mission Programme: This was introduced in 1988 to have a literate India. Though the program was not set under EFYP, the plan has substantially contributed to the literacy rate in India.

Saakshar Bharat: The program aims at educating girl child and was launched in 2009. The program also aims at adult education especially for those who could not complete their education due to some factors.

Right to Education Act: This act works to provide equal opportunity to all children irrespective of status, caste, creed and religion. This has achieved a great success in eliminating child labour and access of better education to all in the age group of 6 – 14.

Midday Meal Scheme: Due to poor facilities and poverty kids are deprived of nutritious food at home. Under this scheme the government provides nutritious food to the children in the school so that they get good food and can concentrate on studies. This will impact the literacy and school attendance in a huge way.

Free Bicycle Program: To facilitate the kids from remote areas to attend schools the government has introduced this program and has given accessibility to the education to kids with transportation problem. This helps the kid to attend school on time and educate.

Sarva Siksha Abhijan (SSA) is a major program to provide quality primary education to the students. This was implemented in 2000 and worked towards improvement of facilities and quality of in education.

National Programme for Educating the Girl Child at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) This program focused on girl child education which was launched in 2003 and was a wing of Sarva Shikkshan Abhiyan. (Dineesha 2017)

5.1 Non- government efforts

Government alone cannot bring down barriers of education especially in rural areas. So many private players from NGO, corporate and individuals work together with government in this direction. Organisations like Pratham, Rotary and Lions Clubs, ITC etc are working towards educative India. Some of the programs initiated from this sector is Manthan Sampoorna Vikas Kendra by Divya Jyoti Sansthan, Mamidipudi

Venkatarangaiya foundation and many more such are bringing change in lives of people and children through education.

6.0 Performance of these Programs

The National Literacy Mission launched campaigns in 597 districts in which 174 are in post literacy stage and 328 are in education phase. The scheme has covered more than 150 million non literates and 125.6 million have been made literate under this program. Saakshar Bharat has operations in 372 districts in the period between 2009 and 2012 and was successfully implemented. 1, 70,000 facilities like libraries were established in the period of 3 years and certified 14,438,004 adults as literates (NLM Report). The census of 2001 and 2011 has reported a substantial reduction in illiteracy rates from 64.84% in 2001 to 74.04% in 2011 the total number of illiterates has decreased from 304.15 million to 272.95 million. The numbers are improving, but are not substantial in achieving the target of EFYP. Right to Education Act, as per KPMG report 2016 on Impact of RIE Act says this act is still a mirage and the results are not encouraging. With all the efforts of the government through various schemes and programs the results have not helped in achieving the target. India is still lacking behind to achieve global standard in literacy rate. The inequality among states is contributing huge in this matter, like Kerala doing tremendously well and Bihar with very low rate. This will affect the country's average. Even with all the efforts of the government and private players the literacy rate has not achieved its set target in the EFYP. Further the disparity is worse with SC/ST and tribal areas which contribute to increase in illiteracy rates in India. These people in remote areas are not just illiterate but also lack in overall development. The EFYP had a target of achieving 85% of literacy rate by 2011 but the performance was 79.01 % (Wikipedia), means the policies and programs were not effectively successful in achieving the target.

7.0 Reasons for Slow Growth in Literacy Rate

The reports and research are of the opinion that lack of awareness about policies and programs is a major contributing factor for this slow growth. Poverty was another major factor which forces for child labour and children evade education. Lack of proper infrastructure and conveyance to school or high education also contributes to the low literacy rate in interior India. Lack of proper sanitation in schools is also a major factor leading to dropouts. A study concluded that 59 percent of the schools do not have sanitation and drinking water facilities. Shortage of teachers who are well qualified and

skilled is also a worrying factor. (Basha, 2018) Lack of community participation in implementation of government schemes, no clear objectives in policies which aimed to spread education and corruption in allocation of funds to these policy implementation are few more obstacles in achieving “Education for All” target. The plans lose their motive and vision at its ground level implementation.

8.0 Conclusion

Education is the only instrument which will upgrade the economic, social and financial status of all the underprivileged. Education is the only way which will determine the success and prosperity in the lives of people. It's not the government mission but every individual must be determined to eradicate the illiteracy and contribute his individual part to the inclusive growth of the economy. Individual, Societal, Community and Government must work synergize to achieve faster results in improving literacy levels. “Teach India” must be the goal of every educated citizen. In the words of Nelson Mandela “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Thus Education to All is must for the prosperity of every individual and for a nation.

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