

“Illiteracy – A social Issue” A brief study in the Indian population

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Abstract— Illiteracy is one of the biggest issues of the modern world; it is found in every corner of the world. And hence we are focusing the depth of this issue in our localities and peer groups. This article is a small-scale survey with data from 500 individual from around the country, asking few important questions to understand the reality of this issue and giving few solutions.

Index Terms— Illiteracy, Indian, Population

I. INTRODUCTION

According to a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), India has the highest population of illiterate adults at 287 million. The statistics point towards the staggering disparities in the educational levels in the country. The illiteracy levels from the year 1991 to 2006 have risen to a whopping 63 percent. A higher literacy rate is an essential requirement for any nation to bring it at par on a global platform with other nations. No nation looks a promising nation if it has a stable economic growth rate but poor literacy rates. Education after all is a fundamental right which is ensured to the citizens. Also, it needs to be highlighted that India is a country where the extent of disparities is such that one nation has achieved a literacy rate higher than 90 percent while on the other hand, there also exist nations where the literacy rates are still dismal i.e. Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh and Bihar.

II. GROUND WORK OF SURVERY

A. What is Literacy

Literacy is defined as the ability to read and write. It is an evolving concept which not only entails the grasping abilities of printed text but also the abilities to adapt visual entities and technological awareness as well. It happens to be a multi-dimensional concept which keeps on adding new parameters to it with respect to the developments that are taking place in a globalized world.

According to the UNESCO, “Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals to develop their knowledge and potential and to participate fully in their community and wider society”.

B. Causes of illiteracy in India

Illiteracy in India is a problem which has complex dimensions attached to it. Illiteracy in India is more or less concerned with different forms of disparities that exist in the country. There

are gender imbalances, income imbalances, state imbalances, caste imbalances, technological barriers which shape the literacy rates that exist in the country. India possesses the largest illiterate population. Literacy rates stood at 82.14 percent for men in 2011 and 65.46 percent for women. This low female literacy is also responsible for the dependency of women on men for activities which requires them to read and write. Thus, this all leads to the formation of a vicious circle. Again, it is no new concept that the rich households will have better access to educational facilities as compared to the poor households. Poor households due to the lack of skills and knowledge involve themselves with unskilled labor in order to save bread for the family, thus, this reduces the focus from achieving education as the main focus deviates to earning income so as to be able to survive in the society. States that spend more on education seem to have a higher literacy rates as to the states which do not invest heavily on education. Kerala is a case in point. The state spends 685 dollars per pupil which also explains its educational levels.

One of the primary reasons for dismal literacy rates is inadequate school facilities. The teaching staff that is employed across the government-run schools is inefficient and unqualified. Another reason which leads to the maximum dropouts among the children is the lack of proper sanitation. A study has stated that 59 percent of the schools do not have drinking water facilities. There is a shortage of teachers as well.

When it comes to laying the blame for the perpetual lackadaisical state of the reading and comprehension levels of the population, the already literate junta is quick to point to the politicians. The politicians on the other hand, blame the people and sometimes even the occasional book publisher for a whole theme park of assaults ranging from lack of teachers to the high price of text books.

However, a quick adjustment of perspective, from the micro to the macro and from the immediate to the abstract, puts the spotlight on the combined economic and population management problems in India as being the root cause of an illiterate India.

C. How economic problems in Indian exacerbate poverty or the case for renewed literacy programs in India

The chicken and the egg problem. There is no better way to describe the debilitating relationship between poverty and unemployment in India. Unless you're graphing the correlation between both of these concepts, establishing a framework that makes working to solve these problems both important and impossible at the same time.

Poverty at its core is a life crippling condition. But literacy, is not. Circa 1881, the illiterate zamindar (who can't read, but

for some reason still keeps stellar and mildly oppressive books of accounts) and an illiterate farmer. In this situation, the acquisition of money makes for a better wager than the acquisition of literacy, ergo education. Fast forward to 2012, and the situation is well, reversed. While the current rate of computer literacy in India is acceptable of, we still treat ourselves as a third-world country, what many an NGO has found that it is not the technology that is a problem, but the fact that people can't read. Providing computers and the pre-requisite electricity to run them is entirely possible. In a village, if you're at a high school level reading in Indian standard terms, you could learn pretty much anything you want. With computers and the fact that you can download the entirety of Wikipedia to a USB thumb drive the size of your, well, thumb means that literacy – both reading and writing comprehension makes illiteracy in India's adults the biggest impediment to their upward mobility.

D. The effects of illiteracy in India:

The biggest effect of illiteracy in India is poverty, as per our study. Poverty also happens to be the single biggest cause of illiteracy in India and a precursor to all other effects. The inability to attain basic nutritious and potable water are the more popularly quoted effects of poverty in India, but the king of the hill when it comes to effects that can fracture an individual remains illiteracy. After all, it is one of those things that actually lets people pick themselves up and out of poverty, even if they have to do it by the way of their bootstraps. The thing about illiteracy in India and its effects is that they all compound together to form a burden that is passed on from generation to generation and if history is any indication, it is one that has been increasing with each generational shift and with each year added to the calendar.

E. Why should you be concerned about the problem of illiteracy in India

The one thing that is clear from the graph above is that enough isn't being to push for the speedy eradication of illiteracy in India. If someone asked you to pick one single metric as a staple barometer of a nation's potential and prospect, it would be literacy. More so for a nation like ours that will have more than 40% of our population in the sub-35 age group in 2015. While the current stance of letting bygones be bygones that the government has adopted as the de-facto response to flanging adult literacy programs in India, has been disappointing, it is the state of the upward growth of child illiteracy in India that is the most alarming of the lot! If I had to pick one single statistic to get the unconcerned citizen initiated, then this would be it. While the plight of the street children in India might not be something that piques your interest beyond the occasional pang of privileged guilt, it really should. After all, the money to support the increasing population of the uneducated is going to come out of your pocket whether you like it or not – taxes. Taxes whether to feed them and clothe them or to keep them from feeding into the veins of the criminal underbelly of your city, the cost of ignoring the problem will eventually come to haunt us all, rich or poor.

F. Making the removal of illiteracy in India a national priority

As far as poverty eradication programs go, the government has been working on trying to get ahead of this problem since

the British sun set on our country. However, there is still need to impress upon the populace that education is the very string that is holding India back and it is, for the purpose of a generalized discussion, what the web of socio-economic issues in India is made out of. The government as well as various NGOs have been working on solving the seemingly insurmountable problem of how we can eradicate illiteracy in India for both children and adults.

Everything from basic financial literacy programs to using computers to help adults learn how to read in less than 24 hours is on the table. While too many cooks may spoil the broth, this particular problem is so complex and multi-headed that we need more, not fewer solutions.

G. The development of education and why new approaches help with Indian literacy

Over the last decade, the new approaches that have come from the government have mostly been in the form of programs as opposed to changes in policy. Even Kapil Sibal's supremely ambitious plan that entails every student in the country being given a tablet computer, is something that is pushed by the Ministry of Education as a program me. The biggest problem with programs per se, is the predictable demise in the effort being put into them after the parliament changes hands. It is therefore left up to NGOs to pick up the functionally successful programs that have fallen out of favor. The biggest example of this is how the Teach India foundation picked up the “Each One, Teach One” campaign.

H. The importance of literacy for a services-based nation like India

The most advanced nations are the most literate, well at least at their peak they are, even though they may have fallen behind to number 64 in the worldwide ranking for math aptitude! For a nation like ours that has been primarily agrarian and then speckled with manufacturing through the late 80s and 90s, literacy has been a means to an end. We've used it as a crutch of sorts but the massive services industry boom that the new millennium has ushered in means that raising the literacy rate in India should be the responsibility of the government servant and the private citizen alike.

I. The Education Level in India – When Raising the Literacy Level Isn't Enough

When it comes to the debate of how the government should allocate their literary budgets, one argument that often pops up against generalized spending is that they should be focusing solely on improving the reading and writing abilities of the population. This of course means that once you teach a 30-year-old farmer how to read and write, his marginal productivity doesn't go up a lot even though the quality of life-experience that he'll experience will go up. That would make the Buddhists happy!

In 2003, when the US government was pushing for allowing corporations to outsource jobs without a tax penalty to India and China, the counter-argument that they gave to the majority of their population engaged in manufacturing was that they would all be privy to the government's initiatives to help retrain them for better jobs. With the bulk of the world manufacturing distributed between China and Brazil, the only way India will be able to hike up its economy is going to be through the services industry.

J. Government's role in eradicating illiteracy:

The Supreme Court in a ruling in 1993 said that children had a fundamental right to free education and thus in the year 2003 the "Right to Education was incorporated in the Constitution under the Constitution (83rd Amendment), 2000".

Despite this, the country couldn't provide free and compulsory education of children up to fourteen years of age within ten years of the bill coming into effect under Article 45 of the Constitution.

Several other schemes too had been launched to ensure the right to education in the country. The National Policy of Education in the year 1986 declared that the whole nation must commit itself to drive away the menaces of illiteracy especially among the young population. The National Literacy Mission in 1988 made literacy a community endeavor. It aimed at attaining a literacy rate of 41 per cent by 2035. The 1992 education policy guaranteed free and compulsory education to all children up to 14 years of age before the advent of the 21st century, a policy which seems to biting the dust today as it has not been able to prevent dropouts among school children and illiteracy prevails.

The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan was launched in 2001 to ensure that all children in the 6–14-years of age-group attend school and complete eight years of schooling by 2010. An important component of the scheme is the Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education, meant primarily for children in areas with no formal school within a one kilometer radius.

K. Problems with government schemes

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan mainly incorporates decentralization for planning and management of elementary education because of which there is an absence of community participation and thus most of the policies fail to generate a mass consensus. Also the mandates of institutions like Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), National University of Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE) clash with each other thus there is no clarity on the objectives of all these bodies with respect to the spread of education. Also, there corruption has become an incorrigible element with respect to the allocation of funds by the government to education. Lesser money than actual budget allocation for education is utilized for the implementation of the schemes.

A major aspect that is slowly ruining the state of education is the commercialization of education both at the elementary and at the higher education levels. Private schools charge enormous fees which makes it difficult for the poor parents to send their children to the schools. The mid-day meal scheme was started with the aim to provide nutritious diet to the children in order to prepare them better for their studies. Instead, the future of the children covered under this scheme seems to be clouded with flies and lizards in the food.

A series of RTIs filed by journalist Siddheshwar Shukla has revealed that during the past three years, the majority of mid-day meals being served to the 11.5 lakh children in Delhi have failed tests conducted by the government.

III. OUR ROLE AND SURVERY:

We made questionnaire asking for people's opinions on literacy. The questionnaire included their education qualification, what they believed to be inculcated in education system to improve the literacy rate, how they feel they can be an asset for the nation in the field of improvement of India's literacy, how have their children contributed for improving literacy rate. We also touched a sensitive corner by asking people about the role of women in education and how that can be improved. We formulated the questionnaire in Bengali, Gujarati, Oriya, Hindi, English, Tamil, and Telugu. We tried to receive responses from the people, belonging to socially backward sections, in their preferred language. The aim here was to reach as many people and to take their review and understand the situation at grass-root level. Here's the sample of the questions that were asked:

1. Name
2. Gender
3. Age group
4. State
5. Education level
6. Marital Status
7. How many children (if married)?
8. Education level
9. Rate the Indian Education system
10. Have you ever faced discontinuation in your education? if yes why?
11. What do you think is the major cause for the low illiteracy rate in the country?
12. What measure do you suggest in order to increase the literacy rate in the country?
13. Have you ever contributed in improving the illiteracy rates in the country? If yes how?
14. No of government schools in your vicinity?
15. No of private schools in your vicinity?
16. Are you aware of the fee exemption and other facilities offered by the government in order to gain minimum high school level education?
17. Was poverty a major hinderance for education?
18. Children should discontinue their education to improve the economic status of the family if the need be?
19. Is there no assistance for education your female child in the state?
20. Do parents and society discourage the education of female education?
21. Do peer group influence children drop out of schools?
22. Are you aware of the NGOs working to reduce the illiteracy rate in the county?
23. Attach as picture of yourself.

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES:

We got the following responses to our survey:

1. From the English Form: <https://goo.gl/a3BbJF>
2. From the Tamil form: <https://goo.gl/Uync17>
3. Other languages: Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali etc: <https://goo.gl/ZsqC4p>

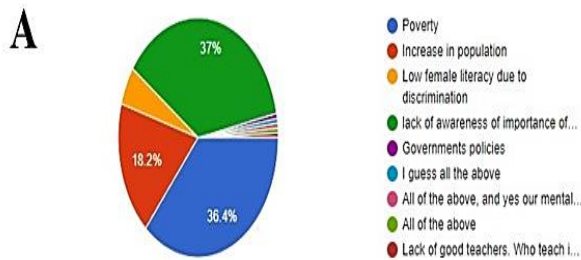
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Analytics of the Acquired Data

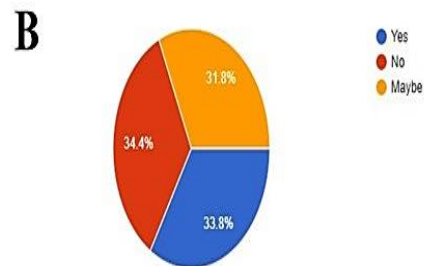
- Most of the respondents (67%) were within the age group of 20-30 followed by 22% being within the age group of 15-20 and the rest between 30-40.
- 56% of the respondents rated our country’s education system as average, with 29% rating it below average and only 20% rating it above average.
- From the responses received, it can be inferred that lack of awareness about the importance of education and poverty are the major reasons for low literacy rates in the country.
- The responses have shown that, in majority of the places, there seem to be only 2-3 government schools nearby and 5-6 private schools. In most rural areas there aren’t any private schools nearby and even the government schools are a few kilometers away.
- The opinion about the quality of educators remains divided with a slightly higher percentage of respondents feeling that the teaching staff that is employed across the government-run schools is inefficient and unqualified.
- People are aware about the schemes by government for the benefit of children and women regarding lack of education. But they are mostly reserved and cynical about the implementation of the schemes.
- Most of the respondents have stated that poverty is the major hindrance for education. Introducing schemes for a better job employment for the under privileged people will have a direct effect on the literacy of their children and the generations to come.
- Majority of the people (around 70%) have disagreed with the statement. Although this is heartening to see, when the income of the family is limited, the children are forced to leave their schools and work.

The opinion is divided which implies that there is a lack of awareness in the society about the various government schemes. The state or the center is introducing schemes but due to various reasons, it does not reach the end users

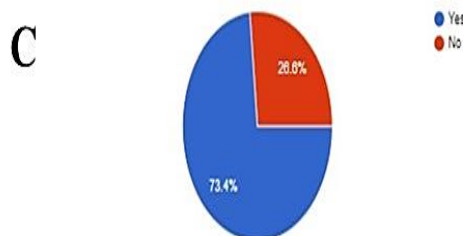
What do you think is the major reason of low literacy rate in the country?



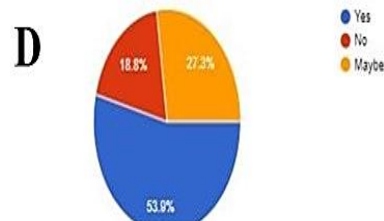
Are your state's educational institutes equipped with facilities, staff and educators to provide quality education for weaker sections?



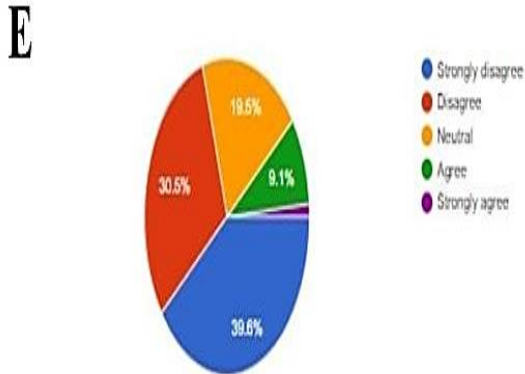
Are you aware of the fees exemption and other facilities offered by government aided schools?



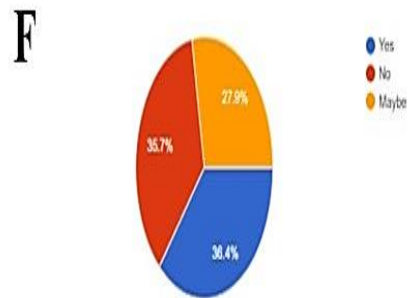
Was poverty the major hindrance for education?



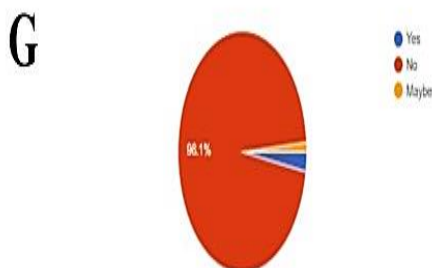
.Children should discontinue their education to improve the economic status of the family if the need be.



Does your state offer financial assistance to educate female children?



Do you consider female education to be a meaningless expenditure?



.Do parents and society encourage the education of female children?

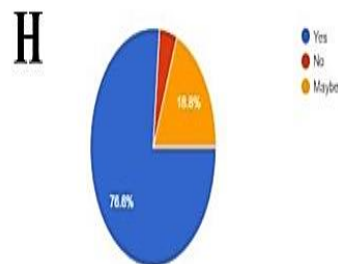


Figure 1- Data Acquired from the survey forms. (A-H represent the data collected for few questions)

- It is heartening to see that the bias against female child education is not as great as it was in the past. People are now ready to take efforts to educate their female children as well.

V. PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED POST ANALYSIS:

- Lack of awareness: Most of the people believe lack of awareness at a basic level is a major reason because unless people understand the importance and the impact of education, the process to make them actually educated is difficult.
- Inflexible Schedules: Despite the availability of free education, many children may still fail to attend schools.

Most of the time, it's because they need to work or help out their families during the day. So, this leaves them with no time to attend the free classes.

- Uncommitted teachers: Most government school teachers take their duty for granted and fail to provide quality education and often don't even turn up to class.
- Lack of career guidance: Unavailability of career counselors for students who have completed their high school education is another reason why most students discontinue their education and do not go to college. Counseling services for college admission is thus required.

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Figure 2- Action plan (5 Sections: Practice, Policy, Evidence, Engagement& Awareness)

VI. OUR PLAN:

- Education has grown as a huge business in our country. PPP (public private partnership) model should come into education system. This model involves the Government joining hands with private schools to fund them for their infrastructure, maintenance and teacher's fees, all of them or either of them and decrease the fees for students so that children can have good access to education at lower fees.
- Introducing a helpline scheme for the children majorly in the age of 16 to 20 for career counseling and telling them about various options they have after completing their basic education and the various scholarships they can avail.
- Projecting videos on a big screen in public places like railway station to create awareness about the various free education schemes offered, among the daily workers and also children, to encourage them to take a step towards literacy and make them understand the importance of the education.
- Ensuring accountability of state-run government schools by regular inspection of labs and other facilities and collecting student feedback, by an external agency. This way, the government schools will ensure that their staff does not slack off and that they provide decent education to the children.

VII. CONCLUSION:

According to the responses we got, there is no doubt left that illiteracy is a huge problem especially for developing countries like India. Literacy programs conducted by government agencies have not fully considered the ideological constraints to participation of children or rather their families. Literacy gains made by children have been slow. The majority of the responses to the reason of low literacy is submitted as „lack of awareness“ and „Poverty“ which we feel is the implication of lack of education. The people need to understand the importance of education and we feel it's less about the policymakers rather than people. When the literacy

rate rises in the rural areas, it will automatically sort the issue of poverty.

Social groups such as NGOs, often willing and committed to counterhegemonic knowledge, emerge as one set of effective mechanisms for the acquisition of both literacy and empowerment of the underprivileged. Quite a few people who submitted the responses are aware about the NGO's working for the people and that's a major positive.

The state should continue to be the focus of pressure to expand primary education, to make it more accessible to poor children, and to make its content more appropriate to a society. The state should also offer the financial resources that children need to participate in literacy programs. There are a few programs in each state but the efficiency is the real issue. Both the teachers and the students have to realize the importance of the basic education and strive for same. Easier said than done, but we honestly feel that unless we focus on awareness campaigns which if not educate them, at least show them the importance of education, we can't make significant progress.

A sense of accountability is necessary to ensure that the government schools' function efficiently. Being under scrutiny, will force the teachers to do their duty sincerely and also improve the facilities such as labs and classrooms in government schools.

Finally, we must initiate serious research efforts in the area of literacy, not only for children but also equally importantly for women because an educated woman will have a huge impact not only for herself but also for her child.

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