

C. FIVE YEAR PLANS ON INDIAN ADULT EDUCATION

Government of India, Planning Commission, *The First Five Year Plan*, Delhi: Controller of Publication (Reprint) 1991 [1952]

Social Education

The concept of adult education, which was mostly confined to literacy, was found to be too narrow to be able to meet the various needs of the adults. It was, therefore, widened to include, in addition to literacy, the health, recreation and home life of the adults, their economic life and citizenship training; and to denote this new concept the term 'social education' was coined. Social education implies an all-comprehensive programme of community uplift through community action. External aid may be there but only to simulate, and to replace, community effort. The importance of such a programme is obvious. It should not only make our limited resources much more effective, but also build up a self-reliant nation. In a country, where nearly 80 percent of the population are illiterate, democracy will not take root until a progressive programme of primary education trains up a generation fit to undertake its responsibilities. Even the programme of primary education is considerably handicapped without a corresponding programme of the education of adults. (p.542.)

Assessment of the Present Situation

The work in the field of social education has been mostly confined to literacy. As a result of the work in recent years, especially during 1937-39 and since 1949-50, the literacy percentage increased from 8.3 in 1931 to 17.2 percent in 1951. Most of the post-literacy work is done through libraries though, due to the dearth of suitable literature, the library movement has not made much headway in the villages. Recently the importance of recreational and cultural activities in programmes of social education has been increasingly recognized. Our cultural agencies like dance, drama, puppet show, fairs and festivals, *bhajan*, *kirtan*, etc., have been used but without any systematic attempt being made to gauge, develop and fully exploit their potentialities for mass education. Fairs and festivals had a meaning in olden times. They have, however, to be reinterpreted and modified to fit into the modern context and become live and full of meaning to the people today. Modern means of mass communication like the film and the radio has attracted much greater attention but, on account of their heavy cost, their use has been very much limited. Attempts have also been made in a few institutions to improve the economic condition of the villagers by teaching them improved crafts and agriculture. Very good all-round social education work has been done by some of the basic institutions. Co-operatives have also been developed as an agency of social education. (p.543)

The Approach

The approach to the problem has to be determined in the light of our resources and the magnitude of the tasks ahead. The total expenditure on social education in 1950-51 was Rs. 83.45 lakhs. The average annual expenditure visualised in the plan is Rs. 3.02 crores. We would however, require an average annual expenditure of Rs. 27 crores for the next ten years to make everybody literate and give him in addition, a veneer of social education in the larger sense of the term. The situation, therefore,

calls for a most carefully planned approach. At the national level, priorities in the programme of social education should be determined by the overall national priorities, thereby not only winning for it the enthusiasm and support of the country at large but also making it directly productive, as it would enable the human factor to respond fully to the national plans of development organization of co-operatives, agencies of village development, co-operative farming, agricultural extension work, etc., are priority tasks in the Plan. We would, therefore, recommend that social education should be based on them. That is to say, it handling these activities utmost attention should be paid to including in the adults right individual and collective habits, and the knowledge of various subjects should correlated to every step involved in these activities, thereby broadening the horizon of the adults and enabling them to understand and effectively participate in the wider national life. For that it would be necessary to give re-orientation courses to the personnel engaged in these departments and to prepare literature to guide them in this work.

Within the broad framework of national priorities the actual programmes in a locality should be determined by local needs: Planning at the local level is equally essential if the danger of frittering away our meager resources in a number of uncoordinated activities is to be avoided. The principles which should govern our approach in this regard may be stated as follows. Our resources should be used in the first instance, as far as possible, for that programme which not only meets some immediately felt need of the local community, in whose midst the programme is conducted, but also builds up resources for developing the programme with the expanding awareness of the community of its own needs. That is the only way by which, with our limited resources, we can make any impression on the problem. Secondly, the social education approach must permeate all programmes of State aid to the people. That is to say that before any programme of State aid is launched the people should be so educated in regard to it that their instinct to help themselves is fully aroused and they are anxious to receive the programme and do their utmost in the execution of it. Thirdly, there should be the closest integration of the various activities conducted in a locality so that the forces of friendship and goodwill released by one activity, immediately recognized by the villagers as good or pleasant, can be utilized for winning their co-operation for activities requiring more strenuous effort or the usefulness of which is not so immediately apparent to them. Fourthly, it should be our endeavour to increase the effectiveness of private agencies doing social education work in an area by giving proper help. (p.544)

The Programme

Besides the social education work which various agencies entrusted primarily with other work—like agriculture, animal husbandry, etc.—may carry on in close connection with their work, the programme of social education will fall into two parts. One should consist of whatever items any agency wants to or is capable of taking up out of the vast field of social education. Such agencies should be encouraged and helped, depending upon the usefulness of the work performed and the extent to which State resources can be diverted for the purpose. The other part should consist of a planned programme outlined below which should be undertaken wherever a properly trained worker is available. This is calculated in achieve maximum results. State resources should naturally be concentrated more on the latter part of the programme and in training workers for it. This programme will differ in rural and urban areas, in view of the different conditions prevailing in each. (p.544)

In rural areas the point at which the social education programme in a locality can begin will of course

depend on the conditions prevailing in the given area. Attempt should, however, be made at the earliest opportunity to organize an economic activity on co-operative basis. The precise nature of the activity and the degree and nature of cooperation will of course vary according to local needs and the degree of maturity of the local people. The underlying object is that not only will it provide education to the participants by organizing community efforts and pooling their resources but it will by the more effective use of local resources, ensure economic gain, which will generate sustained interest and create confidence. The cooperative activity will be the rallying point for the community and mark the beginning of the community centre, the nucleus of which will be provided by the trained community organizer. Where a cooperative society already exists, the task of the worker will be to further improve it and transform it into an agency of social education. Similarly, programmes of health education and health services should also be organized on co-operative lines. The test of the proper time for any programme is that the community is psychologically prepared so that it can organize it with its own resources.

The importance of providing healthy recreation cannot be too strongly stressed. In organizing recreational programmes special attention should be given to the revival and proper utilization of our cultural agencies. Occasion provided by fairs and festivals should be utilized for purposes of education, recreation and community organisation. Literature should be prepared explaining the significance of the various fairs and festivals and their relevance today as well as how their full educational potentialities can be developed and made use of. The State should encourage writers to produce plays containing constructive ideas for such occasions. Film shows by mobile vans may also be provided to the extent that resources permit. It should be remembered, however, that unless integrated with the programme of development going on in an area their use is strictly limited. Certain films which will be relevant to conditions all over India, such as those dealing with common diseases and those calculated inculcate right individual and collective habits, should be prepared by the Central Government and lent out to the various States. Well-regulated radio broadcasts should also be increasingly used for recreation and instruction.

In organizing literacy and post-literacy work the aim should be to put it on a self financing basis, as far as possible, by normally starting it only when the ground has been prepared by some more obviously useful activity like the economic activity, mentioned earlier, and the interest in knowledge has been sufficiently stimulated. A news-sheet, locally produced, and carrying suggestions for improving their lot-suggestions which they can immediately put into practice and in which they have developed faith as a result of the work in the first state-should find ready customers among the villagers. At a later stage the State can help with libraries to the extent that its resources allow. (p.545)

If we have provided the above four programmes, correlating relevant knowledge at every step, we will not only have met the primary needs of the masses but also taught them through living, most of the things that are required for the citizen of a modern democratic State. There is, however, no end to activities that might be included in a programme of social education and, as the capacity of the masses to help themselves increases, more and more activities can be added. The above intensive programme should be spread in the surrounding villages through local leaders thrown up as a result of the working of small groups in youth clubs, women's clubs, children's clubs, farmers' clubs, etc., which it should be the aim of the community organizer to set up. Short and intensive camps should be organized for these leaders where the working of the social education programme is explained to them. Thereafter continual guidance is given to them from his headquarters by the community organizer.

In the case of urban areas, there are so many groups that the problems will have to be studied in relation to each group. The problem of healthy and cheap recreation is also more acute in the towns than in the villages. The overall considerations will, however, be the same as in the rural areas. The programmes must begin with felt needs and must have the capacity to grow by the resources of the local community. But in view of the congestion in towns, the high price of land and buildings and the business of the townsman, the State or philanthropic organizations may have to provide a building for each community centre, though even here the attempt should be to mobilize as much of the local effort as possible for the purpose. As in the villages so in the towns, the State or other organizations that may be doing the work of social education should provide a worker, highly trained in community organization and in the mobilization of its resources. In urban areas, especially in industrial areas, special attention should be paid to improving the skill of the workers. (p.546)

Selection and Training of Workers

The selection and training of workers are perhaps the most important tasks. Two types of social education workers will be required: those who have specialized in community organization, and others who, with proper reorientation of outlook, can work under their guidance. In the case of the former especially, as the qualities of personality—initiative, resourcefulness, leadership, spirit of sacrifice and service and mastery of cheap, simple and intelligent living—are more important than mere academic qualifications, a new system of selection will have to be evolved. The training of community organizers should be very thorough and should consist of improved methods of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, one or two of the most important cottage industries of the area concerned, principles and organization of co-operatives, organization of simple recreational programmes, organization of community centres, etc., and above all the handling of these activities in such a way as to lead to the development of the minds of men most effectively. Training in literacy work should also be given. The training of community organizers should be arranged in conjunction with a training centre for basic teachers, a post-basic school or an agricultural school or college, which should preferably be at an extension headquarters. The greatest stress should be laid on the development of the maximum possible self-help and self-support, consistent with other interests, as these workers have primarily to infuse that spirit among the people. (p.546)

The other category of social education workers will include school teachers, lower level workers, various Government officers working in the locality concerned and workers of private agencies. Regarding pupil-teachers, training in social education work should be compulsory in all training colleges. The State should provide special grants for the departments of social education in training colleges for some years to come to give an impetus to the work. Short and intensive training in social education work should be organized in groups for teachers already on the job. The training of village level workers should also include initiation into the human side of their work: mass psychology, mass approach, community organisation, etc. Training facilities should also be offered for workers of private agencies. Higher officers should be given a reorientation course, so that they develop an integrated outlook, which will not only enable them to guide the worker with sympathy and understanding but also make for better inter-departmental cooperation, upon which the success of the rural development programme in an area depends.

Research in Literacy Methods and Production of Literature

Teachers' training colleges should take up research in methods of imparting literacy. Work in the

experimental centres of social education, which should be associated in the case of rural areas with the group of model basic institutions mentioned earlier, should provide sufficient material for literature suitable for adults. There is also considerable room here for inter-departmental co-operation and for cooperation between the States sharing a common linguistic area. The Centre should provide model guide books for workers and prepare pamphlets on certain standard subjects like health, democratic citizenship, co-operatives, etc. (p.547)

Devising A Suitable Machinery

The present stage of social education in the country is essentially experimental and needs Central guidance. The work should be coordinated with similar work in basic education and a common committee of experts should advise the Centre in the matter of initiating and aiding financially experimental work in both these fields in the States, and guide it, assess the results and make them available to other States. A common national platform, where the various agencies can meet at intervals for mutual discussion—so necessary for evolving a common outlook and securing coordination of different agencies—is already provided by the Indian Adult Education Association.

The director of social education in a State should be a man highly trained in community organization and should be able to advise and help the State in the matter of public participation in its various development programmes. He should have a body representing important non-official agencies to advise him.

At the field level it is mostly a task of re-organizing and coordinating existing agencies rather than of creating new ones. The problem is different in rural and urban areas. In rural areas the following measures should be taken:

- (i) Educational institutions should become examples of self-helps, democratic community living, cooperative labour and intelligent handling of economic activity. Education should centre round agriculture and cottage industries and educational institutes should be well equipped with agricultural farms, craft work-shops, etc. Educational institutions would thereby become excellent centres for spreading ideas for improving our social and economic life. Basic schools, which are already conceived on the above lines, have special significance in this regard. All facilities should, therefore, be provided at the basic training centres so that the teachers are trained as first class social education workers.
- (ii) The village level worker, wherever provided, should also be stationed in a school, as far as possible. Under his guidance even an ordinary school may begin to make some contribution, which will also prepare it for ultimate conversion into a basic school.
- (iii) Besides the above agencies the State should provide, wherever possible, community organizers, say one for 50 villages, to make use of help, guide and coordinate the activities of all agencies working in their respective spheres. These also should be attached to educational institutions.
- (iv) The role of private agencies has already been discussed.

In urban areas quite a large number of agencies exists and the key problem is to coordinate their

activities for a comprehensive programme of social education. For this purpose, city or town social education councils should be instituted, where they do not exist already, each consisting of the representatives of the various agencies operating in the town concerned. This Council should distribute items of social education work among various agencies according to their capacity and willingness to undertake it. Social education in industrial areas in towns has special importance in view of the dull and drab conditions of life prevailing in urban areas. Here the employer and the labour unions should be able to cooperate. (pp.542-48.)

II

Government of India, Planning Commission, **Second Five Year Plan**, Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1991 (Reprint)

Social Education

The census of 1951 showed that only 16.6 percent of the population were literate and even if children below 10 years are excluded the proportion rises to 20 percent only. Apart from the low percentage of literacy there is serious disparity in literacy between men (24.9 percent) and women (7.9 percent) and between the urban population (34.6 percent) and the rural population (12.1 percent). Rapid social and economic progress along democratic lines and widespread illiteracy are scarcely compatible with each other.

As essential reforms proposed in the system of education are carried out, facilities for continuation classes and social education classes at various levels should be developed. Plans of States provide for the opening of literacy and social education centres, training of social education workers and organizers, libraries, publication of literature, audio-visual education and establishment of Janata Colleges. The total allotment in the plan for social education is about Rs. 15 crores, including about Rs. 10 crores in the national extension and community development programme. The Ministry of Education propose to establish a fundamental education centre for training social education organizers and for continuing study and research in problems relating to social and basic education.

While literacy is undoubtedly important, it should be recognized that it is one element in a wider concept of social education. Social education embodies a comprehensive approach to the solution of the problems of the community, primarily through community action. Besides literacy, it includes health, recreation and home life, economic activities and citizenship training. The entire national extension and community development programme, social welfare extension projects. Rural programmes undertaken by Government agencies in cooperation with the people, programmes of voluntary organization like the Sarva Seva Sangh, the Bharat Sevak Samaj and others, the cooperative movement, village panchayats etc. are all facets of the nation-wide effort towards social education and rural improvement which is now in progress in the country. From this aspect the range of social education work is not to be judged merely by the financial provisions made specifically under this description. However, as an organized and systematic activity directed to specific purposes, social education is a new field work. A large number of development agencies are engaged in some form of social education. Their work has to be supplemented by suitable specialized agencies. The beginning made in this direction in national extension and community project areas has, therefore, much significance. A period of careful evaluation will help to determine the nature

of specialized agencies and methods and techniques needed in this field, both in rural and in urban areas. (p.271)

III

Government of India, Planning Commission, *Third Five Year Plan*, Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1961.

Social Education and Adult Literacy

As was stated in the First Plan, social education implies 'an all-comprehensive programme of community uplift through community action'. Social education, thus, comprises literacy, health, recreation and home life of adults, training in citizenship and guidance in improving economic efficiency. In the last analysis, in the setting of democracy, the success of planned development, which encompasses the needs of millions of people, depends on the spread of social education and a progressive outlook and the growth of a sense of shared citizenship. Yet, the educational aims of agriculture, community development, health and other welfare programmes are among the most difficult to realize. Over the past decade, in several directions there has been a measure of progress, as in the development of community centres, reading rooms in villages, organization of youth groups and mahila mandals, and the revitalization of village panchayats and the cooperative movement. One aspect of social education, and in some ways the most important, has, however, caused concern. Between 1951 and 1961, literacy has increased only from about 17 to about 24 percent. The introduction of Panchayati Raj at the district and block levels and the important role assigned to village panchayats render it imperative that in as short a period as possible a substantial proportion of the adult population should become capable of reading and writing. This is essential in their own interest as in that of the community as a whole. As sufficient progress has not been achieved so far in this direction, the problem is now being studied afresh with a view to working out means for the rapid expansion of adult literacy.

Programmes of the Ministry of Education provide for the further development of the National Fundamental Education Centre as a part of the National Institute of Education, production of literature for neo-literates, assistance for voluntary organisations in the field of social education and expansion of library facilities. The educational plans of States provide for libraries and continuation classes and, to a limited extent, for adult schools and other schemes for promoting adult literacy. The main provisions for social education are made under the community development programme through the schematic budget. Altogether, in the Third Plan, about Rs. 25 crores are expected at present to be available for social education.

Any large-scale and effective programme for adult literacy must be based on the closest possible cooperation at every level of personnel engaged in education and in community development. It will call for a pooling of the available resources in men and money, mobilization of voluntary workers and organization and development of adult education and literacy work at the block and village levels, and in every city and town, so that it takes the character more and more of a popular movement. Social education and adult literacy have to be developed as extension activities undertaken by educational institutions, especially village schools, in collaboration with panchayats and cooperatives and voluntary organizations. The broad aim should be that wherever a group of persons sufficient to constitute a class desires to attain

literacy, the requisite facilities by way of teachers and teaching materials should be made readily available. Every educational institution should be involved in this effort, and individual teachers participating in it should be given suitable honoraria. At the same time, the village panchayat and other agencies should make their due contribution towards the effort. While Social Education Organizers, Block Education Officers and individual educational institutions should work closely together to place the facilities needed at the service of local communities, it will be primarily for Panchayat Samitis, village panchayats and voluntary organizations to create and maintain popular enthusiasm and develop adult education and literacy on a continuing basis in a manner related organically to their own needs and conditions. At every step the local leadership, the teachers and the voluntary workers should be drawn into the movement for the expansion of literacy both among men and among women. Proposals for a large-scale programme of adult literacy on these lines are being drawn up by the Ministry of Education in consultation with the Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation, and it is hoped that appreciable progress will be realized during the Third Plan. (pp.598-600)

IV

Planning Commission Government of India, *Fourth Five Year Plan 1969-74*, Delhi: Manager, Publication Branch, 1970.

Adult Literacy

Efforts will be made to spread literacy amongst adults through mobilization of voluntary effort and local community resource. Pilot projects will be initiated in selected districts to begin with and the programme will be extended to other areas in the light of experience. For the development of the programme, assistance will be sought from industry, from the students working under the National Service Scheme, and from voluntary organizations which will be assisted financially and given technical guidance. The programme of Farmer's Education and Functional Literacy in the high-yielding variety areas, already mentioned under agriculture, will be extended to 100 districts and will cover one million adult farmers. Adult education will continue to be an integral part of the community development programme. The University Departments, of Adult Education will be helped to take up pilot projects, to conduct research and organize extension and extra mural lectures. The national Board of Adult Education has been set up to advise Government on the development programmes and for enlisting the cooperation of the interests and agencies concerned. The further development of television and the experiments with satellite communications, which are to begin from 1972-73, may have significance for education, especially adult education. (p.361)

V

Government of India, Planning Commission, *Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79)*, Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1976.

Non Formal Education

With the strengthening of existing programmes of non formal education about 16 lakh participants are expected to be covered under these programmes. The existing programmes are intended to be reviewed. (p.77)

VI

Government of India, Planning Commission, *Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85)*, New Delhi: Manager Government of India Press, 1981.

Adult Education

The Sixth Plan lays emphasis on minimum essential education to all citizens, irrespective of their age, sex and residence. The approach to achieve this objective would be characterized by flexibility, inter-sectoral cooperation and inter-agency coordination. Technocracy would be adopted as the major instrument for the spread of literacy, numeracy and practical skills relevant to the economic activities of the people concerned. It would be supported by post-literacy, continuing education through a network of rural libraries as well as instructional programmes through mass communication media, particularly after the INSAT is launched to its orbit.

Non-Formal Education for adults, particularly in the productive age-group 15-35 years, would receive priority in the Sixth Plan, in view of its potential for immediate impact in raising the level of productivity in the economy. The programmes of adult education, which had been initiated in the previous Plans and which form part of the minimum needs programme of elementary education would be made more effective and extended in cooperation with the other developmental activities and the employment agencies. The programmes would aim at extending appropriate educational support to the concerned groups of individuals and development departments through carefully designed group-specific and work based curricula which would be integrated as part of development activity. They would also take advantage of the cultural and other group characteristics in the process of involving the learner groups to participate in, and benefit from, adult education programmes.

While designing this programme, the lot of the weaker sections like women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and agricultural labourers as well as slum dwellers would be given priority. The strategy in these cases would be the development of methods and contents suited to the varied needs and situations, thus promoting flexibility in the programme and in the means of delivery of education. It would also help to involve voluntary agencies of established repute; such agencies have shown a great capacity to innovate effectively and their involvement will be useful where culture-specific improvisations are required.

VII

Government of India, Planning Commission, *Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90)*, New Delhi: The Author, 1985, vol.II.

Adult Education

Eradication of adult illiteracy and the development of a programme of continuing adult education is a major thrust area in the Seventh Plan. The task of covering all the illiterates in the age-group 15-35 years by 1990 is a formidable one. As motivation of the learner is crucial for success and as the number to be covered is about 90 million, the strategy to achieve the goal can only be through a mass movement involving social institutions, voluntary organizations, students, teachers, employers and the community.

This programme will also have to be linked effectively with various development programmes especially the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). Active participation of village panchayats, mahila mandals, community centres, etc. is essential. Employers will be required to impart necessary functional education to all their illiterate employees. The programmes of Nehru Yuvak Kendras (NYK) and the National Service Scheme (NSS) will also focus on eradication of illiteracy. Programmes for motivating the learners by holding community meetings and through publicity, through posters, films broadcasting, etc. will be implemented on an adequate scale and with sufficient intensity to create a conducive climate. A network of libraries and the development of follow up literature for neoliterates will also be initiated as a follow up programme to avoid lapse into illiteracy. Community participation in all literacy programmes will be an essential feature from village level upwards to give proper direction and orientation and lend effective support to this national programme.

Another aspect of education of adults relates to training in functional skills relevant to their respective economic activities. Programmes for this purpose will be strengthened and adequate resource support provided for organizing technical and vocational skill-based courses for the benefit of adult learners through Shramik Vidyapeeths and other similar institutions. As a part of the post literacy and follow up services, short duration condensed training courses will be organized for upgrading the skills of the neoliterates and for increasing their awareness of various social events. The existing programmes on rural functional literacy and State adult education programmes and various training programmes for adult learners will be consolidated and dovetailed in the new mass movement programmes on adult education. Citizenship education including adult education, will be a necessary part of the entire education system, and will be specially promoted (pp.252-252).

VIII

Government of India Planning Commission, *Eight Five Year Plan (1992-97)*, New Delhi: Manager, Government of India Press, 1992, vol.II.

Adult Education

The NPE and the Programme of Action (POA) envisaged that the Adult Education Programme (AEP) would cover 4 crore illiterates by 1990 and another 6 crores by 1995. With the launching of the National Literacy Mission (NLM) in 1988, the targets were reformulated and strategies recast. Accordingly, 3 crores illiterates were expected to be covered by 1990 and 5 crores by 1995. While Rural Functional Literacy Programme (RFLP), the post literacy the teaching learning process were modified, new strategies like area specific and time bound approach to achieve 100 percent total literacy (TL), massive participation of non governmental organization (NGOs) and students and effective utilization of traditional and folk theatre forms in literacy work were evolved. By 1991-92, the post-literacy programme was institutionalized in the form of 32,000 Jan Shikshan Nilayams (JSN). Apart from the introduction of Improved Pace and Content of Learning (IPCL) method, which reduced the duration of learning from 500 to 200 hours, technology demonstration programmes were initiated in 42 selected districts. The scheme of Shramik Vidyapeeths (SVs) was reviewed, suggesting a need for expansion. The number of State Resource Centres (SRCs) increased from 19 to 20. A National Institute of Adult Education (NIAE) was set up in January, 1991 to augment the technical and academic resource support to adult education and to undertake quality research evaluation studies.

Area-Specific and time-bound mass campaigns for TL first launched in Kottayam town and Ernakulam district in Kerala in 1989 with the active participation of students and voluntary agencies have been extended to other districts. By March 1993, twenty five districts had achieved total literacy (in the sense of 85 percent literacy) and TL campaigns were at different stages of progress in 80 districts in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal converging over 3 crore illiterates with the help of about 30 lakh volunteers.

IX

Government of India Planning Commission, *Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002)*, New Delhi: 1999, vol.II.

Adult Education

- 3.3.61 Literacy, the key to most of India's development programmes, is the catalyst to accelerate initiatives in health care, agriculture, primary education and in all critical areas of development.
- 3.3.62 In the light of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments, literacy has assumed even greater significance. If power for local self-governance is to devolve to the panchayats and nagar palikas, literacy is an essential prerequisite for these institutions to be effective.

Critical issues in Adult Education

- 3.3.63 Despite this key role, much still needs to be done. India has the largest number of non-literate people in the world - about a third of the world's total of around 900 million. Although literacy levels have increased from 16.67 per cent to 52.21 per cent since independence, unrestrained population growth has proved to be a serious impediment.
- 3.3.64 The literacy levels of women are low - 39.29 per cent as compared to 64.13 per cent for men. The fact that female literacy is acknowledged as being one of the most significant indicators of development makes this all the more alarming. With one third of the seats in panchayats and nagar palikas reserved for women, the need for them to become literate is vital.
- 3.3.65 There are large regional disparities in literacy rates - between urban and rural areas, as well as between States. While about three quarters of the urban population is literate, the literacy rate in rural areas is less than 45 per cent. The literacy rate of women in rural areas is even lower at 31 per cent.
- 3.3.66 Seven states - Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra - account for around 70% of India's non-literate population. The first four of these states alone, are home to around half of India's non-literate people.
- 3.3.67 In its endeavour to achieve the goals it has set for itself in adult education, India faces several challenges. Studies by expert groups and the constant evaluation of the programme, indicate several principal challenges.