

Adult Education and Democracy in India

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Zusammenfassung

Adult education movements in India has a history prior to the democratic status of the country. Social reformers of pre independent India focused mostly on providing basic literacy to adults and to bring education to masses within a short time. To extend the use of vernacular languages and to create love for the mother country were also the purposes of this movement (Myrdal 1968, p.1654). India celebrated the country's independence with only 18.3 percentage of literate population (Census of India 1951). People of the country welcomed democracy with not much understanding of the meaning of democracy and the power associated with it, as prior to independence they were under British rule and under the rule of various Kingdoms for centuries. With illiteracy, people are also likely to carry along their low self-esteem and low decision making abilities. Though the percentage of literate people increased over the years from 18.3 percent to 74.04 percent (Census of India 2011), the number of illiterates also kept on increasing. At present India has 266 million illiterate population (UNESCO 2018). As the democracy of the country, its governance and development is decided by adult suffrage, India with its huge share of illiterate population, in spite of its participation in democratic process continued to remain developing for more than seven decades. Considering democracy as common people's strength, which is exhibited through voting rights and directly related to one's ability to make informed decisions, the decision making abilities of illiterate adults is indeed a matter of concern. This paper tries to analyze the potential contribution of adult education to develop well informed participation of all citizens in the democratic process of the country.

1. Introduction

The earliest reference of national level academic inputs on the theme could be referred to the national seminar organized by Indian Association of Adult Education at Pudducherry (then Pondicherry), India from 26-29 December, 1968. The seminar was held after 18 years of democracy in India on the theme 'Adult Education and Parliamentary Democracy'. During the seminar it was stated that there was no automatic correlation between education and freedom or between adult education and parliamentary democracy. But at the same time adult education for parliamentary

democracy is an educational style of living, of living democratically, which involves family, the school, the work and leisure time institutions and the society in general. Democratic living also involves the participation of the citizen as a voter, as member of the party and as an office holder; and the performance of all these relate to postulate dialogue; discussions and decision making (Adishesiah 1968, p. 26-43).

The seminar recommended that adult education for parliamentary democracy is necessary not only for the illiterate, the semi-literate or the relatively less educated but is essential for the entire citizenry. Particular emphasis should be laid on the education of legislators, cadres at different levels, civil services and professional men and women in the basic tenets of parliamentary democracy (Adult Education for Parliamentary Democracy (16th National Seminar 1968, p. 13).

In a study on the influence of adult education on Swedish elected officials, it was found that 66 per cent of the parliamentarians, 79 per cent of the social democrats, 87 per cent of the agrarians, 41 per cent of the liberals and 33 per cent of the conservatives had recourse to adult education (Erickson 1966.). Adult education prepared city council members in Stockholm and three other selected communities ranged from 51 to 80 per cent. Even in the cabinet, 7 of 15 ministers prepared for public service through adult education. The success of parliamentary democracy in Sweden is certainly assured by its adult education activities.

2. Post Independent India and beginning of democracy

Though India became independent in 1947, independence came with partition of the country on the basis of religion and India and Pakistan became two separate countries, more than 10 million people were uprooted and transferred from their natives and nearly 1 million people died in the process. British India consisted of 17 provinces and 562 princely states.¹ The provinces were given to India or Pakistan, the princes of the princely states, however, were given the right to either remain independent or join either dominion. The new Government of India employed political negotiations backed with the option of military action to ensure the primacy of the central government and of the Constitution then being drafted. The Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution of India on 26 November 1949. India became a sovereign democratic republic after its constitution came into effect on 26 January 1950. The constitution of India gives the power of democracy to its people through three tiers of the government, namely: Central Government; State Government; and Local self-Government. The Local Self-Government in India has two forms: Urban-Municipalities; and Rural- Panchayats. People vote every five years to elect members to these bodies. Traditional Panchayat system of India was formalized as Panchayati Raj in 1992 by the 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution.² The Panchayati Raj now functions as a system of governance in which gram panchayats are the basic units of local administration. The system has three levels: Gram Panchayat (village level), Mandal Parishad or Block *Samiti* or *Panchayat Samiti* (block level), and *Zila Parishad* (district level). As per the Constitution of India, 74th Amendment Act of 1992, there are only three categories of urban local bodies: Mahanagar Nigam (Municipal

Corporation), Nagar Palika (Municipality) and Nagar Panchayat (Notified Area Council or City Council).³ Thus the Constitution of India through its amendments from time to time ensures to safeguard the democratic values of the country. It also ensures that the power of democracy reaches each and every individual through adult suffrage.

3. Adult education and literacy in post-independent India

A government resting upon popular suffrage can't be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. Since, a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find out a substitute in voluntary dispositions and interest. These can be created only by education (Dewey 1916, p. 101).

Adult education, as the term signifies, is the education of 'grown up' 15-35 years. Adult education aims at extending educational options to those adults, who have lost the opportunity and have crossed the age of formal education, but now feel a need for learning of any type, including literacy, basic education, skill development (Vocational Education) and equivalency⁴. In the UNESCO glossary, adult education is very aptly defined as: education specifically targeting individuals who are regarded as adults by the society to which they belong to improve their technical or professional qualifications, further develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge with the purpose to complete a level of formal education, or to acquire knowledge, skills and competencies in a new field or to refresh or update their knowledge in a particular field. This also includes what may be referred to as 'continuing education', 'recurrent education' or 'second chance education'⁵. India's post-independence period was characterized by public enthusiasm for nation building. Literacy for self-reliance, literacy for equality, literacy for dignity seem to be the three cardinal points of Laubach's adult education philosophy and programme (Lautach 1985, p. 45). His unfinished script on his typewriter indicated his belief in educating the masses for self-reliance. It read as follows: „We cannot feed all the hungry people of the world. But we can teach them to feed themselves” (Shah 2000, p. 33)

With the objective of promoting adult education, a series of programmes have been introduced since the First Five Year Plan, the most prominent being the National Literacy Mission (NLM), that was launched in 1988 to impart functional literacy to non-literates in the age group of 15-35 years in a time bound manner. By the end of the 10th Plan period, NLM had made 127.45 million persons literate, of which, 60 % were females. In 2009, another massive literacy Mission, 'Saakshar Bharat' (meaning Literate India), was launched with the objective of achieving 80 % literacy level by 2014 at national level. The mission has four broader objectives, namely imparting functional literacy and numeracy to non-literates; acquiring equivalency to formal educational system; imparting relevant skill development programme; and promote a leaning society by providing opportunities for continuing education⁶.

4. Democratic values

Democracy originated more than 2,400 years ago in ancient Greece. The word democracy means ‘rule by the people’⁷. Democracy signifies not only more numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control. It also means not only freer interaction between social groups but also change in social habits. A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience (Dewey 1916, p. 100).

It was felt that the basic values of democracy include the following in particular:

(1) Belief in the dignity of the individual, the sanctity (sacredness) of the human personality and the equality of individual rights. (ii) Belief in the inherent capacity of the individual for growth and development and to take care of his affairs, to understand and participate in local, national and international affairs. (iii) A sense of integrity and respect for the democratic institutions. (iv) Openness of mind, belief in the emergence of truth after a rational discussion of a problem, faith in compromise and democratic methods of consultation and discussion for a fair and rational resolution of conflicts. (v) Belief in the rights and obligations of the electorate. (vi) Acceptance of the majority decision by the minority. (vii) Acceptance of a minority’s right to propagate its views without endangering national security. This refers only to rights of racial, religious and linguistic minorities. Indeed in a democracy there can be no permanent political majorities or minorities (Singhvi 1968, p. 3)

5. Relation between literacy rate, voting percentage and electoral outcome

India became independent in 1947 and republic on January 26,1950. India conducted its first census in 1951, followed by it’s first general elections (lok sabha) i.e election of people’s representative to the central government, from 25 October 1951 to 21 February 1952.

Literacy rate (as per census) and voting percentage in General Elections in India

General Election	Year	Voting Percentage	Literacy % as per Census of India	Winning party to rule
1-	1952	61.2	18.3 (1951)	Indian National Congress (INC)
2-	1957	62.2		INC
3-	1962	55.42	28.3 (1961)	INC
4-	1967	61.33		INC
5-	1971	55.29	34.45 (1971)	INC
6-	1977	60.49		Janata Party
7-	1980	56.92		INC (I) (Indira)
8-	1984	63.56	43.57 (1981)	INC (I)
9-	1989	61.95		Janata Dal + alliance
10-	1991	56.93	52.21(1991)	INC alliance

11-	1996	57.94		Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) + alliance
12-	1998	61.97		BJP + NDA (National Democratic Alliance)
13-	1999	59.99		BJP+NDA
14-	2004	48.74	64.83 (Census of 2001)	INC+UPA (United Progressive Alliance)
15-	2009	59.7		INC + UPA
16-	2014	66.38	74.04 (Census of 2011)	BJP led NDA
17-	2019	67.36		BJP led NDA

It was observed from the above table that 61,2 % of India's eligible voters exercised their adult suffrage for the first time to form a democratic government with only 18.3 % literate people. India witnessed 17th general elections in 2019, where 67.36 % voters casted their votes. It was observed that though people's literacy percentage increased consistently for 18.35 to 74,04 %, no such co-relation could be established between increase in literacy rate and participation in adult suffrage. However, it was interesting to note that literacy had some impact on people's awareness about political parties and their ability to decide on whom to cast their votes. As shown in the table above, with less than 50 % literacy rate India voted for one political party (INC) in 7 elections, out of 9 general elections held. With the increase of literacy rate above 50 %, India voted for another national party BJP led NDA, 5 times out of 8 general elections held so far. This statistics could very well be summarized as people's decision making abilities having direct relation to their literacy level.

The provision for symbol against each political parties and independent candidates practiced since independence, helped illiterate masses to vote for the desired party or candidate as per its symbol. During the election campaigns, the campaigners would carry their symbols in various forms and size so that even the illiterate ones could memorize and identify the symbol and cast his/her vote accordingly. At the same time, amongst the literate masses, nearly 430 million Indians own a smartphone, half a billion use the Internet, 300 million use Facebook, 200 million send messages on WhatsApp and 30 million use Twitter⁸. With the information available on social media about political parties, there is a strong possibility that such information would influence voters in their decision making process.

6. Facts from the field

A total of 453.6 million Indian (37 %) migrated from one place to another and 71 % of migrant reported more than 10 years of stay in one place. The figures for net rural and urban migration for employment reasons are 56 and 31 % respectively⁹. The above statistics indicated that more than 70 % of migrants had lived in a community for two generations, and thus upbringing of the second generation had to happen in the same community. Amongst them, those who were less educated and migrated as labourer, ended up staying in urban slums and sub-urban areas of the city. And thus the vicious cycle of lack of opportunities continues to generations. World Bank re-

ported in one of its study that higher relative mobility across generations is associated with lower inequality of opportunity, which is the extent to which people's life achievements are affected by circumstances they are born into, such as parental education and income, race, gender and birthplace¹⁰.

To bring desired positive changes amongst the people of marginalized community and to co-create opportunities through people's participation, one such community based organization, Centre for social change (CSC), started its intervention at one of India's urbanized villages, Barola, located in Noida, Uttar Pradesh in 2018. Nearly 80 per cent of female domestic helpers working in these multi-storied buildings resided in Barola. CSCs 'Happy Childhood' programme focused on providing basic education and afterschool support to children mostly studying in government schools. Children were taught through playful activities like art, games, hand printing etc., and training on skill based activities were organised for adolescents and youth (female) under Empowered Self programme. Funding for CSC activities is mostly received from trust members, individual donors and volunteers and through organizational partnership¹¹.

In one of its' initiative to know the family members of the children, CSC invited mothers and elder siblings of the students for an informal discussion, where 14 mothers and sisters were present. Out of 14, a total of 12 were illiterate. In another discussion there were 10 participants and out of which 4 were illiterate. All the 24 participants were in the age group of 20-30 years, mostly migrated from the villages of Uttar Pradesh in search of livelihood and better education for children. Out of 24, illiterates were 16 (66,6 %), 9 mothers were earning money and supporting the family by working as cook or domestic helper (37,5 %). Discussion outcomes focusing on their illiteracy and decision making abilities were summarized as follows:

- Each illiterate mother or sister felt ashamed of themselves to recognize the fact that they were illiterate.
- All of them blamed on the economic situation and family restrictions for remaining illiterate. Situations like need to work in the field from an early age or to look after young siblings at home so that mothers could go out and work prevented them from attending formal schooling.
- All the 16 participants, who were illiterate expressed a desire to learn. And their main reason of motivation were, they would be able to monitor their children's study and read prayer books.
- Though, they were not in a position to look after their children's study, all of them wanted their children to learn and study well
- All 24 women expressed their interest to learn a skill along-with literacy.

Considering their level of illiteracy, CSC initiated Mother's classroom programme along with skill development and empowerment programmes. However, 50 % of them dropped out of the course after their first few sessions. As all the participants were from the neighborhood community and some of them were mothers of the children participating in CSC activities, the centre followed up the dropped out cases to understand the reasons for withdrawing of their participation.

The reasons were summarized as follows:

- Husbands told them not to waste their time learning literacy at such an age, when it would be of no use.
- In spite of being illiterate they were earning 10-15 thousand INR per month as domestic help. They themselves were not enough convinced about the need of being literate or learning a new skill.
- Their early marriages (average age of marriage 16 years) and working hard throughout made them tired and old even before the age of 30. They almost stopped dreaming for a better life for themselves and more eager to look for opportunities and benefits for their children.
- All of them were willing to earn some extra money, provided it could be earned by working from home.
- They were comfortable to move in a group. Decision of one person to opt out of a programme would influence the group decision. For example, if four persons were coming from one community and one decided to opt out of the programme, remaining three would also stay back.
- Another reason for dropping out was the season at the time of the programme, which was winter, and participants felt it was not a comfortable season to come out of home.

When it came to their understanding about politics and democracy, their source of information was mostly neighborhood gossip sharing. Due to their illiteracy they could not get connected directly to information available on social media and dependent on other literate member (mostly male member) of the family for such information, which could again be interpreted from one's own perspective. Though they understood that they had a right to vote, majority of them did not believe that their votes had power to bring change. They understood election, vote and political parties, but not much sure about democracy. In response to one of our specific questions on how would they decide about whom to vote, majority of the participant's responded that they would discuss with their husbands/family and decide on whom to vote.

7. Conclusion

Democracy is directly related to the development of the country. Until and unless development is increasingly visible, we could not ensure that the country is fully democratic. While present day technology and social media would be one of the medium of communication to promote democracy amongst eligible voters, the decision making abilities of the voters would be the main criteria to make democracy work in its true sense. The country had two categories of voters, whose participation in democracy need to be ensured. One category is voters who did not cast their vote (32,64 % voters who did not vote in 2019 general election) and the other category is illiterate adult (32,4 % illiterate adult were illegible to cast vote in 2019 general elections¹²). Here, adult education could play an important role through which voters of both the categories could be reached, trained and motivated to participate towards

betterment of democracy. Inclusion of electoral literacy and voting in Adult Continuing Education in draft National Education Policy, 2019¹³ by the Government of India indicates that the thought process is already on at the policy level and now there is a need for systematic implementation approach. Adult education as a discipline, as a profession and as grassroots institution must play role of providing authentic information, creating well planned curriculum on democracy and electoral education and research based ethical approach of the adult educators by staying away from any political influence while imparting the curriculum amongst the masses. Thus adult education could play an important role in developing India into a fully democratic nation.

Anmerkungen

- 1 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Republic_of_India
- 2 [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayati_raj_\(India\)#cite_note-4](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panchayati_raj_(India)#cite_note-4)
- 3 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipal_governance_in_India
- 4 mhrd.gov.in/adult-education
- 5 uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/adult-education
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- 13 innovate.mygov.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/mygov15596510111.pdf

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