

Literacy in the context of the Constitution:

This Consultation paper focuses on two specific aspects of education: literacy as a vehicle for a healthy democratic process within the framework of welfare state and universalisation of Elementary Education, which has been spelt out as a specific Directive Principle of State Policy in the Indian Constitution. This paper does not follow a strict distinction in meaning between *Literacy* and *Education* and assumes that since they have overlapping connotations as instruments of socio-economic progress as well as for individual growth, the interchangeability is acceptable.

Mass education, land reforms, and women's equity/empowerment were the three pronged strategies on which the constitution makers of India had visualised the socio-economic transformation of a free India. This was evident from the initial steps that the government took, such as the zamindari abolition Act, community development programmes, and the Hindu Code Bill [which envisaged empowerment of women through the right to inherit on an equal basis with other male siblings]. The Constitution makers felt that the future and hope of mankind lie in educational advancement and a Welfare State has to make suitable provision for the same. Advocates of State supported education in the past have usually rested their case predominantly on the two extra economic considerations of equality of opportunity and social cohesion. That is, the state being responsible for ensuring that the disadvantaged sections got the preferred weightage and discriminations in this field does not lead to a rupture in the social fabric of the society.

Census 2001

Population of India: A little over 1,027,000,000. This figure represents one-sixth of the population of the entire planet.

Growth rate of Population: has fallen by 2.52 per cent over the previous decade

Literacy Rate: At All India level: 65.38 % overall; male literacy: 75.96 % Female literacy: 54.28%. This represents an increase in overall literacy percentage by 13.75% from last Census. The corresponding increases in Male and Female literacy is 11.83 % and 14.99 %.

Sex Ratio: Has gone up to 933 from the earlier Census figure of 927

The term Literacy means the ability to read and write with understanding in any language. A person who can merely read but cannot write is not classified as literate. The literacy level of the country at the time of independence was only 29.45 per cent, with male literacy at 39.45 per cent and female literacy at 18.69 per cent. [The total population at this time was 360 million]. The latest Census estimates (2001) the All-India figure as 65.38 per cent; male literacy stands at 75.85 %; and female literacy at 54.16 %. While examining literacy rates, it should be kept in mind that literacy rates for the decades 1951, 1961, and 1971 relate to population aged five and above and for 1981, 1991 and 2001, to population aged seven and above. [The 1981 census excluded Assam and the 1991 census excluded Jammu and Kashmir] In absolute numbers, it means that in 1981, there were 302 million illiterates and in 1991, there were 324 million. If the age five and above criteria is taken, then in 1981 there were 350 million illiterates and in 1991, 371 million.

Attempting a Definition

In a letter to the International League for the Rational Education of Children, on 14 August 1908, Rabindranath Tagore argued for viewing education as 'a right which enables individuals and communities to act on reflection'. The relevance of this kind of a definition over many others is that (a) it treats education as a fundamental right; (b) takes care of the social dimension of education; (c) emphasises the importance of critical enquiry, and (d) stresses upon the link between education and social action.

Education is a vast subject. The aims, ideals and values of education, for example, could be looked into from the philosophical, sociological, historical and psychological angles. The value system of a society can be sociologically described and explained. The goals of an educational system can be studied as they evolve historically. In a country of continental proportions, with its different communities and people with different socio-economic backgrounds, and literally living in different centuries in terms of thought, the aims of education are often at variance with the thoughts of experts in the field.

Historical Background

The significant feature of the ancient Indian education system was that it excluded the majority in the name of social cohesion. Caste system and its corollary, a strictly hierarchised society, kept education in the domain of the powerful/twiceborn few. There were instances of enlightened rulers or religious leaders who tried to break these shackles, but the society retained the characteristics of an inward looking, undynamic entity. In 1817, the Maharani of Travancore (Kerala) issued a statement conveying her desire to educate her subjects, so that they could participate in the process of administration. Ram Mohan Ray, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Rabindra Nath Tagore- all contributed to the change in the education system in modern India. It was during the British rule that liberal education was introduced in India. Dada Bhai Naoroji, in 1881, had represented to the Indian Education Commission, for considering state sponsored free education to all children for atleast four years. Though the report (1882) did not agree to his submission, it provided that all schools, which are run by state help, can not deny admission to any body on the grounds of caste, creed, sex and traditional taboos.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale moved a resolution on the subject in the Central Legislative Assembly in 1910 and again took the proposal up in a bill in 1912, neither of which achieved their objective. The Indian Education Policy was announced in 1913. It made provision for state aid for expansion of education in provinces, but refused to provide for free and compulsory education to all on the ground of financial difficulties. Yet it advised the local self-governments to provide some relief to the poorer and deprived sections of the society.

The public demand for compulsory primary education continued to grow, and between 1918 and 1931 compulsory education laws were passed in most parts of the country by the newly elected State legislatures in which Indians were in majority. In 1937, Mahatma Gandhi put forward his scheme of Basic Education (popularly known as the Wardha scheme) under which education of seven or eight years duration was to be provided for all children and its object was to equip children with a socially productive craft. This was put into practice in several Indian provinces where the Congress Government was in power between 1937-39. As the national movement grew in pace the idea that it was the duty of the state to provide free and compulsory education to all children till they reached the age of 14 years was nationally accepted as a necessary goal of free India. The British Government accepted these ideas and under Sir John Sargent, the then educational adviser to the Government of India, put forward a proposal (1944) to provide free and compulsory basic education to all children in the age group 6-14 over a period of 40 years (1944-1984). The nationalists felt that it was too long a period, and a committee under the chairmanship of B.G.Kher proposed that this goal could and should be met within a period of 16 years (1944-1960). It was this recommendation that was eventually incorporated in the Constitution as a Directive Principle of State Policy. Mahatma Gandhi had made education a vital component of his constructive programs, and as a mass campaign had tried to make districts completely literate. Some success was also achieved. For instance, Surat District, in the erstwhile Bombay Presidency had been totally literate, but again relapsed into illiteracy for lack of follow-up action. There were efforts at spreading by the Baroda Rulers, supplemented by a live library movement. Here again lack of follow-up and sustained efforts caused a relapse into

illiteracy among the vulnerable sections. Some voluntary agencies as the Karnataka Adult Education Council, Gujarat Social Education Committee and Bombay City Social Education Committee have had some measure of success. The Literacy House of Lucknow did commendable work in this field. It came into existence in 1953 when its founder, Mrs. Welthy H. Fisher, established it in a small verandah at Allahabad, with a view to eradicate illiteracy and promote education in India. It was shifted to Lucknow in 1956.

Purpose of Universalisation of education

The problem of illiteracy is not confined to developing countries alone. Poverty and illiteracy go hand in hand. The poor are cut off from the democratic process. Education is acknowledged, as the tool needed to understand the social, historical, behavioural and physical laws that shape the human condition. A comprehension of those forces endows human beings with the capacity to alter the conditions of their lives. According to the Literacy Research Center at the University of Pennsylvania, over one billion individuals worldwide, nearly 25% of today's youth and adults, cannot read. Even fewer comprehend simple arithmetic and far fewer have access to electronic superhighway. Yet the developed world gets over the problem by layering it up with the economic surplus. Lack of literacy and its consequences are one of the major problems faced by the developing world, specially Africa and South-East Asia and have been identified as the major cause of socio-economic and ethnic conflicts that frequently surface in the region.

Literacy as a component of the development process is central and fundamental to many state sponsored programmes in less developed countries. An illiterate person is poorly placed in the matter of accessing useful information or resisting misinformation. This also prevents him/her from accessing the benefits of the development process. In a general way, an illiterate person is less able to transform and use the information inputs to avail the freedoms/ choices in enhancing the quality of her life. Right to education is now a fundamental right. The concern for education, i.e. universalisation of elementary education, has been on a back burner for a long time, though periodic lip service in the form of recommendations of various commissions and committees have been paid.

There is a popular belief that poor parents are not interested in educating their children. But this does not stand the scrutiny of reality. In fact several research studies have shown that most poor see education as one of the major means of emancipation. Failure on the part of the state to provide such guarantee is contempt of popular aspiration.

By improving people's ability to acquire and use information, education deepens their understanding of themselves and the world, enriches their minds by broadening their experiences, and improves the choices they make as consumers, producers and citizens. Education strengthens their ability to meet their wants and those of their family by increasing their productivity and their potential to achieve a higher standard of living. By improving people's confidence and their ability to create and innovate, it multiplies their opportunities for personal and social achievement.

Economic advancement has a direct correlation with education levels. This has been reinforced by research. Though some may disagree with such a view of education, even a broader view of education does not entail a denial of economic benefits. Creating an aware and creative labour force is the object of every democracy.

Joy of learning and social well being are the other factors, which makes it imperative on the part of the state to guarantee compulsory education. In the first case, the right to education has to be understood as education of a certain quality. Here care must be taken to ensure that the girl child is not deprived of such joys because of social and customary practices. Regarding the second point, it has been established that child mortality rates and better health care flourish quickly in a literate environment. The case of Kerala, the most literate state, where infant mortality rate is 14 per 1000 live births and Madhya Pradesh, one of the most backward states, where it stands at 97. Live childbirths are indicators for a host of social and economic situations along with health and nutrition level of mother.

While dealing with issues of disease, population growth, and environmental awareness, it has been found that, an educated mother is much better placed in disseminating these values in the household and the community at large. In fact, there is no doubt that education is one of the prime vehicles of social progress. The single most important contribution of literacy/education is that it not only removes

disabilities, it also positively endows the person with certain abilities. Another reason as to how literacy enhances individual well being is by strengthening the self-esteem of a person.

Political participation is crucial to the health of a democratic system. Common causes hindering such participation are economic deprivation, lack of transparency in the system of government and illiteracy. Since it can be argued that education/ literacy could facilitate in overcoming the other two deprivations, effective participation in democratic process can be ensured through spread of education.

Universal elementary education is a necessary component for social justice. India has a long history of educational disparities being used to consolidate social inequalities based on caste, class, and gender. Privileged social groups still have better access to education and opportunities and these further help to consolidate their position.

Fundamental Right to Education

The 93rd Amendment Act makes the right to education a fundamental right for children in the age group of 6-14. It is to be kept in mind that the rhetoric of universalisation of education is going hand in hand with an increasing retreat of the state's commitment for welfare measures. In recent years there has been a tremendous growth in the number of private schools. These schools, mostly teaching in English medium, claim to be better equipped than the government run schools. Related to this is the issue of teaching medium, which has been discussed in some details below. Here it would suffice to say that people from all sections of the Indian society now consider education in English medium to be a passport to better job opportunity and social mobility. This state of affairs is not just an indictment of the government, though it has the primary responsibility of translating the right to education into reality. But political parties, civil society organisations, and social movements have also failed to challenge this apathetic attitude of the government. The right to education is, ultimately, a social responsibility and when it is violated, everyone is responsible. The majority of children to be covered by this Act are from Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes and other Backward Class communities. The fundamental right to free education will have paramount importance to them, but that section of the society also has a large number who are above 14 and illiterate. It is worth sparing a thought about the fundamental nature of this right.

The universal free and compulsory education should have become a reality in India by 1960. Article 45 of the Indian Constitution says: '*The State shall endeavour to provide within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years*'. But that Constitutional obligation has not been fulfilled, mostly due to an apathetic attitude of the state. The 10th Five-year Plan visualises that India would achieve the Universal Elementary Education by 2007. The Supreme Court of India, way back in 1993 had said: "It is noteworthy that among the several articles in part IV only Article 45 speaks of time limit, no other article does. Has it not significance? Is it a mere pious wish, even after 44 years of the Constitution?" The Supreme Court of India gave the clear verdict that education is a fundamental right for *all children* up to 14 years. In this sense the 93rd Amendment Act does not fulfil the judgement and, can be termed as regressive.

In the 93rd Amendment Act, the provision for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in the age group of 0-6 has been included in the Directive Principles of the State Policy. But the ECCE in the 0-6 years is a part of the fundamental right to education, and shapes the most vital period of the child's development.

Further, the Act says, "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the state may, by law, determine". This might be used by the state to dilute the quality of education by resorting to second class alternatives like single teacher schools, Education Guarantee Scheme, para teachers, etc.

The Act does not specify the financial allocation to impart free and compulsory education to all the children in the age group between 6-14 years, let alone the 0-6 age group. And it does not define exactly what is meant by the term 'free', because we know that parents do incur a lot of expenses regarding books, uniforms etc. even if the fees are waved off.

The Government of India appointed a committee under Tapas Majumdar to look into the viability of universal elementary education. The Committee recommended that in poor rural India the Government should give utmost importance to the formal village school instead of pursuing low cost education to attain the stage of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) with uniform quality. The Act ought to have included a financial memorandum as per the recommendation of this Committee (i.e., Rs 1,40,000 crores over 10 years for educating children between 6-14 years) and an additional allocation for the 0-6 age group children. There should also be an additional allocation for the nutrition, health care and developmental opportunities for this age group. The committee submitted its report in 1999. 60 percent of the signatories were senior IAS officers, who in our country are responsible for majority of policy decisions. The Minister for Human Resources in India has recently announced a special allocation of Rs10, 000 crores for this purpose. The crux of the committee's recommendation was that it is possible to provide for the universalisation of elementary education if the state spends only 0.7 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product extra for a period of 10 years. In fact India had committed to spend 6 per cent of its GDP in 1964, but till now the allocations have hovered around 3 percent.

Spending in per cent of GDP

	Health	Education	Defence
India	2	3	15
Pakistan	1	2	31
Korea	1	21	17
Thailand	6	17	7
Malaysia	6	23	11
Nepal	5	14	6
US	6	8	4
World	10	6	9

Source: UNICEF: The State of the World's Children 2002.

Basic Literacy and Functional Literacy

The focus of mass literacy efforts by the government is in terms of basics – the mechanics of reading, writing and attention to computation (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) in mathematics. It is recognized that these basics are not rooted in the goals of higher-order thinking – conceptualizing, inferring, inventing, testing, and thinking critically. It is true that these literacy programs are not geared towards such goals. An analysis of absence of literacy and its political and cultural consequences among the population shows the need to move literacy expectations beyond the ability to read, write and calculate. The recognition that literacy has to be *situationally relevant* has given rise to the concept of '*functional literacy*', the need for which has been emphasised by the Second Education Commission [1968]. This means that education efforts must be useful to the recipient in negotiating her day to day situations. Indeed, it is probably in recognition of this limited scope of literacy, that our Constitution makes a reference to *education and educational opportunities* and not to *literacy*.

Literacy and Human Rights

Literacy is now part of the Human Rights Dialogue. Now most of the nations of the world have also accepted their obligation to provide at least free elementary education to their citizens. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and Professional education shall be generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

This Right is also repeated in the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child which seeks to ensure *“Right to free and compulsory education at least in the elementary stages and education to promote general culture, abilities, judgment and sense of responsibility to become a useful member of society and opportunity to recreation, and play to attain the same purpose as of education”*.

India has ratified the above, and these have thus the power of domestic laws. From the Human Rights perspective, constitutional guarantees arise automatically.

Literacy and Human Development

The investment potential on human capital has now been recognized. According to World Bank's assessment for 192 countries, physical capital on an average accounts only for 16% of total wealth. More important is natural wealth, which accounts for 20%. And more important still is human capital, which accounts for 64%. Literacy is now part of the Human Development Index, as it is a cumulative measure of several factors that contribute to human development. As per UN Development Report, 2000, India's ranking in HDI is 128, with education index registering a low 0.55 due to a low adult literacy rate of 55.7 and combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment of 54.

Education is an integral part of national development. Education and development are linked in a variety of ways. First, education, as stated earlier, is a human right, the exercise of which is essential for individual development and fulfillment. The capacity of an individual to contribute to societal development is made possible and enhanced by his or her development as an individual. In this light, education is also a basic need. It is also a means by which other needs, both collective and individual, are realized. Thus, education is the instrument by which the skills and productive capacities are developed and endowed. Without organized literacy action, illiteracy will continue to exist along with the associated ills of poverty and underdevelopment. Experience has shown that determined literacy action is the exception and that more often, literacy campaigns are 'turned on' and 'turned off' in line with short-term policy changes. Hence the need for Constitutional reform and guarantees in terms of the 93rd amendment Act.

Education for Social transformation

The Indian Constitution has recognized the significance of education for social transformation and social justice. The Preamble affirms liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship and equality of status and opportunity and to promote amongst the people a feeling of fraternity, ensuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation. Literacy forms the cornerstone for making the provision of equality of opportunity a reality. Judicial interpretations have brought into focus many provisions of the Constitution, thereby widening its meaning with the change in time. In Francis Coralie Mulin v. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi (1981), Justice Bhagwati observed:

The fundamental right to life which is the most precious human right and which forms the arc of all other rights must therefore be interpreted in a broad and expansive spirit so as to invest it with significance and vitality which may endure for years to come and enhance the dignity of the individual and the worth of the human person. We think that the right to life includes right to live, with human dignity and all that goes along with it, namely, the bare necessities of life such as adequate nutrition, clothing and shelter and facilities for reading, writing and expressing oneself in diverse forms, freely moving about, mixing and co-mingling with fellow human beings.

Again, the Supreme Court in its judgment in the case of *Bandhua Mukti Morcha, etc. vs. Union of India* (J.T. 1997 (5) SC 285) specifically referred to the earlier judgments made in this connection as under:

In Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Education v. K.S. Gandhi JT 1991 (2) SC 296, right to education at the secondary stage was held to be a fundamental right. In J.P. Unnikrishnan V. State of Andhra Pradesh JT 1993 (1) SC incumbent upon the State to provide facilities and opportunity as 474, a constitution Bench had held education upto the age of 14 years to be a

fundamental right.... It would be therefore enjoined under Article 39 (e) and (f) of the Constitution and to prevent exploitation of their childhood due to indigence and vagary.

There have been specific amendments to the Constitution affecting education, as in the 42nd, 73rd, 74th, 83rd and 93rd Amendment Acts. These amendments pertain to provisions to enable education being included in the Concurrent List, devolution of powers to local bodies and making elementary education a Fundamental Right formally.

Equality of educational opportunity

'Equality of Opportunity' is a basic feature of the Constitution. This has been interpreted as "equality of education" which itself is subject to a variety of interpretations, each leading to different policy outcomes. In particular, "equality of education" may mean equality of access to education, equality of educational facilities or equality of educational performance. Our Courts have struggled in the face of affirmative action or what is known as 'positive discrimination' in favour of the deprived sections, while at the same time preserving the needs of quality of education and fair play. The government of India had stated as its goal Education for All by 2000. But that is history. Now it has set its target date as 2007. The avowed reason for delay being assumption of unrealistic goals and lack of proper planning.

Review of achievements

The Education Department publishes educational statistics every academic year, called *Education in India*. There are also two expert institutions under the aegis of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, viz. National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) which carry out regular research and surveys, and in-depth analyses.

A core curriculum is emphasised at the elementary school level. This is a carefully planned curriculum so that it can help in overcoming discrepancies between the educational opportunities of urban and rural people, and that of men and women.

NCERT has been conducting regular educational surveys and the report of the Sixth Educational Survey was published in 1995. Highlights of the findings of this survey are:

Sixth All India Education Survey (Conducted by the NCERT)

Main Outcomes of the Survey

1. 94 per cent of the Rural Population is served within 1.0 kilometre by Primary Stage.
2. 85 per cent of the Rural Population is served within 3.0 kilometre by Upper Primary Stage.
3. Of the Total 8,22,486 schools in the country, 5,70,455 and 1,62,805 are Primary and Upper Primary Schools respectively.
4. Of the total 15,39,06,057 pupils enrolled in all the schools, 9,70,29,235 and 5,40,71,058 are children enrolled in Primary grades (Grades I –V) and Upper Primary (Grades VI – VIII) stages respectively.
5. Of the total 41,97,555 teachers, 16,23,379 and 11,29,747 teachers are employed in Primary and Upper Primary Schools.
84 per cent of the primary and 89 per cent of the Upper Primary Schools have pucca and partly pucca buildings.

Similarly, NIEPA had carried out a research based on Fourth All India Educational Survey data. In that study (*School Education in India, Regional Dimension*), it was found that in spite of the supposed expansion of education, inequities within the educational system of the country continue to be quite sharp, especially when it comes to the question of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes women in the rural areas. The literacy rate among this group in the 1991 Census was only 16 %. This was followed by SC Rural Male (19.45 %), SC Urban Female (42.25 %). The causes for educational deprivation in India have been found out to be due to inadequate parental motivation, poverty, often resulting in educating the male child, and low quality of schooling (*EPW* July, 1998). On the other hand, a survey of 5 states done by a team of researchers under Jean Dreze and Shiva Kumar (Public Report on Basic Education) states that it is a myth that parents do not want to educate their children.

They find inadequate facilities and low content of curriculum as the main reasons for the inequities in the field of education.

A review of the Government's efforts in the direction of universalization of elementary education shows that while there has been expansion in terms of numbers, there has been a decline in the quality content. But the biggest shortcoming has been the lack of "adequate emphasis" on adult literacy.

Adult Education

Eradication of illiteracy has been one of the major national concerns of the Government of India since independence. During the first five-year plan, the program of Social Education, inclusive of literacy, was introduced as part of the Community Development Program (1952). The States made efforts of varied types for the spread of literacy. Among these, the Gram Shikshan Mohim initiated in Satara District of Maharashtra in 1959, was one of the successful mass campaigns. It aimed at completing literacy work village-by-village within a short period of 3 to 6 months, through the services of primary school teachers and middle school and high school students, who volunteered for the job, and supported by the entire community. It achieved a good deal of success but suffered from the lack of follow-up due to financial constraints and some of its good work was lost as a consequence.

The issue was dealt at length by the Education Commission headed by D. S. Kothari, (1964-66) which emphasized the importance of spreading literacy as fast as possible. The Commission also observed that "**literacy if it is to be worthwhile, must be functional**". It suggested expansion of universal schooling of five-year duration for the age group 6 – 11; provision of part-time education for those children of age group 11 – 14, who had either missed schooling or dropped out of school prematurely; provision of part-time general and vocational education to the younger adults of age group 15 – 30; use of mass media as a powerful tool of environment building for literacy; setting up of libraries; need for follow up program; active role of universities and voluntary organisation at the State and district levels. A multi-pronged approach of universalisation of elementary education and universal adult literacy was adopted for achieving total literacy. The National Policy on Education (1986) gave priority to the following three programs for eradication of illiteracy, particularly among women: -

- a) Universalization of elementary education and universal retention of children upto 14 years of age.
- b) A systematic program of non-formal education in the educationally backward states.
- c) The National Literacy Mission aiming at making 100 million adults literate by 1997.

The major thrust of these programs was on promotion of literacy among women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The University Grants Commission, the department of continuing education, and projects like the farmers training and functional literacy, have all at various points of time taken up the cause of adult literacy and have miserably failed.

In one sense, though the Non-formal education system was launched with its own set of objectives, the main purpose was to tackle the problem of dropouts from the formal system. The dropout rate continues to hover around 50% and has not shown any great variation in the last four decades (dropout rate ranging in Grades I-IV from 64.0 in 1960-61, to 67 in 70-71, to 58.7 in 1980-81 to 44.3 in 1990-91. The dropout rate in Grades V-VIII ranged from 74.3 to 63.4 during these decades). It is not difficult to guess the identities of the children who fail to survive at school. They are mostly children of landless agricultural labourers, peasants with relatively smallholdings, rural artisans and urban migrant labourers. Caste-wise, a substantial proportion of them belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The situation of children belonging to the Scheduled Tribes is perhaps worse, since they have had to bear the brunt of development initiatives of the state in the arena of dam construction, development of tourism, reservation of game sanctuaries, deforestation and mining. Apart from this, other factors like, bias against tribal cultures and languages also makes the school curriculum a deterrent for the advancement of tribal education. There are about 40 million rural artisans in India. For them, the current standard school curriculum offers little meaning. Finally, the child residing in a slum, living in conditions of uncertainty and violence, is always a likely case for early withdrawal.

The National Literacy Mission (NLM) came into existence in the mid 1980s. The policy paper spoke of a comprehensive approach to development in which literacy figured as one of the key components. The approach was based on people's participation and the programme was subject to social audit. In 1989, the district-based Total Literacy Campaigns (TLC) were launched as a program strategy for the National Literacy Mission. It was a time bound programme that banked on mass voluntary participation. The Total Literacy Campaigns, initially at least, managed to evoke popular participation, though here again, the lack of a follow up schemes and the problem of sustaining the momentum largely defeated its objective. The lack of visible success is also due to the attitude of the government reflected in the areas of allocating money for the programme, providing institutional back up, and proper coordination and planning.

In the budget of 1999-2000, the total allocation of resources (both Plan and non-plan) for the four programs, Elementary Education, Operation Black board, Non-formal education and Adult Education was respectively, rupees 3037, 400, 350 and 113.4 crores respectively. In the system of central planning we have in this country, only the resources required from the government or public sector agencies are taken into account. However, for an activity like education, there are considerable costs borne by the parents. These costs are not included in the financial implications presented, except for the provision of incentives like books and uniforms to the weaker sections. The Constitution has directed that education for children in primary and upper primary levels of education should be free. In practice, this has meant that schools should not charge any fees. The cost incurred by parents for providing books, clothes and other facilities has been ignored and has not been considered as a violation of the directive of free education. Ideally these costs should be borne by public funds.

Further, there is the problem of mother tongues and languages of teaching. For instance, there are 1652 mother tongues [identified in the recent census] and 15 major languages accorded constitutional status. Then there is the problem of script. In a vast country like India, keeping in mind the linguistic minorities' interest, the need for meticulous planning is self-evident. That brings in the concept of biliteracy, meaning the need to be literate in atleast two languages.

India also has a long tradition of transmission of ideas and wisdom orally. For example, the Vedas were passed from generation to generation by word of mouth and knowledge remained accessible to only a privileged few. These difficulties are sought to be over come by a collaborative effort between the government and the civil society organisations. The object is to enable the individual to access opportunities, so that she is able to tackle the world outside on equal terms. For this, literacy has to be a continuous and self-sustaining priority of all governments.

The *Education For All* document, released by the GOI, looks at the problem from a collaborative point of view. It emphasises the role of community participation in carrying out the educational goals envisaged in the constitution. By involving the community, it is hoped that the process of democracy would be strengthened and there would be an automatic quality check on the content of education.

INTO THE FUTURE

Education faces the task of adapting to the needs of the times. With the Information technology revolution in the country, it has become necessary that education should now provide technical knowledge to the students to avail of the widening employment opportunity. The UNESCO also emphasises the need for "continuous renewal" of education in order to remain relevant. The source of such renewal is the ' the heritage of collective experience and values which education transmits to the new generations'.

Change from teaching to learning process

In the 1970s, there was a change in the way education was to be imparted and the objective of such education. American behavioural scientists and radical thinkers like Paulo Friere proposed a shift from teaching mode to learning mode. In this framework nobody teaches any one, but people learn from each other. In other words, all are learners. The aim of education is not to enable people to fit into a system but to help them negotiate with the system. Three distinct global developments that have affected the future course of education policy are the pace and rate of growth in knowledge systems

and their increasing interlinkages; revolution in the field of communication; and increasing input of culture in education.

It is estimated that in the period 600 BC to AD 1700, the body of scientific knowledge doubled every 1000 years; from the beginning of industrialisation until the early twentieth century, the doubling period accelerated to about 200 years; and now in many scientific fields, knowledge is doubling every 15 years or so. Moreover, the lag between a discovery in a fundamental science and its technological application has narrowed remarkably. This enormous growth in the volume and application of knowledge has deeply affected every aspect of modern life. Parallel to this is the increasing pace at which knowledge is being circulated. This has given rise to new areas of knowledge, which have broken down the demarcating lines between traditionally perceived fields of knowledge.

There has been a revolution in the fields of communications and informatics. The development in computer technology has affected every aspect of human activity. Telecommunications and data processing have increased dramatically the volume of information readily available as well as its accessibility.

The other source of educational renewal is the composite cultural heritage that is passed through education. In the times of liberalisation and growing domination of market values in social life, and a tendency towards homogenisation, the need to reaffirm cultural identity is more urgent today. These identities shape our perceptions about our world and are at the same time the product of the world's perception about us. Next to the family, the school is the most important institution for the transmission of cultural values. It is increasingly realised that the method of instruction must be geared towards bringing out these values in a constructive way.

Educational Technology

The tools and techniques available for imparting education are undergoing change. The phrase 'Educational Technology' was defined by the National Council of Educational Technology (UK) as *the development, application, evaluation of systems, techniques and aids to improve the process of human learning.* It emphasises on new ideas and innovations in the field of education with the help of modern technology. There are two approaches – hardware and software - in educational technology. The hardware approach is based on the application of engineering principles for developing electromechanical equipment like motion pictures, tape recorders, teaching machines, computers, videotape, closed circuit television, etc. The software approach uses the principle of psychology for behaviour modification purposes. These approaches are used for mass education as well as individual instruction. Television is the most obvious example of mass instructional technology. Teaching machines are examples of individual instructional technology.

In order to reach out to a large number of people, who find it difficult to attend formal learning schemes, the concept of distance learning has been evolved. Learning at one's own convenience in terms of time, pace and resources is provided in this system. With the increasing use of satellites and other avenues of communication, the student is no longer hindered by lack of access. But this is still limited to the urban populace.

Technology is an enabling tool. The use of computers in education opens up the concept of interactive teaching. Experience at MS Swaminathan Research Foundation as well as in many villages in Pondicherry and Madhya Pradesh have demonstrated that a high level of formal education is not necessary to gain operational computer literacy, and as a functional education tool, it is valuable.

Updating is one of the important aspects of renewal in the education process. There needs to be a continuous and sustained effort from all concerned. Knowledge expands and values undergo change. The policy makers should be open enough to adapt to the changing situation. The experience of the developed countries in this regard has been to provide those aids, which facilitate education process. These may include guaranteeing a decent livelihood, health care, minimum nutrition level or other material benefits. The Japanese model of education reforms which focussed on long term administrative reforms, structural reform of elementary education, and a continuous process of adaptation to the changing ideas and techniques in education is often cited as a success story.

In the Indian context, Krishna Kumar (1998) lists three tendencies in the current scenario in education: the first is related to the drastic reduction in the number of children who proceed beyond the primary and secondary stages; the second, is the excessive focus on higher education, with the culturally dominant and economically stronger sections of society using the state's resources to consolidate their hold on the state apparatus; and the third, is the inherent divisiveness in the system which protects class interests. All this, Kumar argues, lead to a skewed social development scenario, which is reflected in the material distribution of wealth in the society.

Goals and targets

In the approach paper to the Tenth Plan, the government accepts its failure in spreading literacy. The revised target year to achieve universal access to primary education has been set at 2007. Similarly, the targets for progress in literacy have now been realistically fixed at 72% by 2007 and 80% by 2012. There is need for fresh initiatives. As far back as 1966, the Second Education Commission observed: *"It is no longer desirable to undertake educational reforms in piecemeal fashion, without a concept of the totality of the goals and modes of the educational process. To find out how to reshape its component parts, one must have a vision of the future. This search for practical alternatives are parts of a genuine strategy of innovation seems to us to be one of the primary tasks of any educational undertaking."*

It is true that the education system has undergone many types of changes and experiments. Many a new thought and idea has been tried out and implemented at some point of time and in some part of the country.

In an effort to bring uniformity in education, in Gujarat, for instance, the final examination content had to be toned down and alternative subjects had to be offered following the new education policy. Instead of New Mathematics, Commercial Arithmetic and instead of New Science, Everyday needs of health and hygiene, were introduced. Thus in Gujarat, parallel streams of the normal school system and the basic and post-basic schools exist till date along with several parallel examining bodies. As an innovative step the Gujarat government even tried involving private educational trusts in running the schools and that too did not bear much positive results.

Dr. Malcom Adiseshiah, an eminent educationist, proposes adoption of decentralised planning process in order to develop a holistic approach to education, keeping in mind health, housing and livelihood issues. That is, the content and method of education should be developed in a bottom up manner keeping in focus the needs, necessities and aspirations of the people at the lowest strata of society.

Functional Literacy through Modern Information Technology

Conventional methods of education involves mastering a script, learning words and sentences, etc., that have no direct relationship to everyday life of the learners. The learning process has to be directly relevant and useful to them. The Education Division of the Tata Consultancy Services claims to have evolved a system where the learners are exposed to a set of about 500 words and pictures that have a direct relevance to them. By repeated exposure of these words and pictures, the learners become familiar with them and learn to recognize them. This method of learning enables them to even read newspapers and magazines and activates an interest to know more. If necessary, they can then join a formal education program. Video projections and large computer screens aid such learning process. Developing a model of learning which takes care of the lacunae of the existing system and at the same time be effective and useful is a matter of debate. But such models may be developed for specifically deprived sections of the society.

Can Educational Funding Become Participatory?

It is largely believed in India that education should be the responsibility of the state. Though community and civil society participation to monitor these efforts is on the increase, it is still in the purview of the state to provide basic facilities. Most of the NGOs are, however, dependent only on government funding for their activities, and funding them for this activity will be only an indirect government support. With large business houses expressing interest in Welfare measures, at least in the geographical regions in which they operate, they can be encouraged to contribute to such causes.

Local Institutions like Panchayats and Gram Sabhas should also be encouraged to take interest in these activities, but the state should be the agency of all such initiatives and should under no circumstances ignore its obligation towards society regarding education..

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Universalization of Education: Need for Consensus

There is general consensus about the need for universalisation of education. Cutting across political ideologies, all governments have declared it as their priority. This has now been made an important component of National Human Development Initiative (NHDI) and also the Prime Minister's Special Action Plan. In a situation when the need for strong political commitment is being increasingly felt, one cannot but feel cynical, given the track record of the government in this regard. What is required is ensuring irreversibility and giving a sense of perspective by not distorting history. Planning the contents of curriculum for the young mind that gets easily swayed by 'what is taught' rather than 'what is desirable to teach', is probably more difficult. The commitment of the various political parties on universalization of elementary education must also converge into a consensus on content and dissemination.

Sunset laws

Sunset law is a concept borrowed from the American history. The idea is of a time bound, self-retiring government program with a clear objective and financial provisions. This also serves as an accountability tool. Our Constitution makers had prescribed time limits for a number of provisions. These time limits have been treated rather lightly or extended to suit the convenience of governance. In matters of education, these sunset laws should be adhered to, and the degree of accountability to the people's forum respected.

Is it necessary to make certain provisions unambiguous at least in matters of education, as not to be dependent on judicial activism? Can we expect a Constitutional amendment to accelerate 'the demand for accountability in the system of education, particularly from its bureaucracy?'

Some suggestions

The scope of the Preamble itself could be enlarged so that the fruits of education reach one and all without fear, favour or discrimination. Enlarging the Preamble can give it the nature of a basic feature of the constitution, which would be difficult to tamper with. In a constitutional democracy it is the duty of the state to provide protection to the culture and social mores of the minority.

With the vast changes taking place in the world of knowledge and communication, it might be worthwhile to **incorporate a new right, as Right to Knowledge**. Its practical implication will be for the State to set up libraries or information centres accessible to one and all. A model of a typical Knowledge Centre for Information Management has been developed for the Union Territory of Pondicherry. In a collaborative project between International Literacy Institute and Indira Gandhi National Open University entitled, Bridges to the Future Initiative (BFI), there is a mention of medium-term development of Community Learning and Technology Centres (CLTC). With the coming of a digital age, these may be the new versions of libraries-cum-community access centres. This can serve as a model. The Right to Knowledge is broader than the Right to Know which has already been derived from the existing Fundamental Rights.

The free and compulsory education concept should not be diluted on the grounds of economic constraints. In the arguments for education being able to pay for itself, it is forgotten that there is already a levy of education cess on the citizens, which goes to finance education. It has been reported that the Soviet Union has gone to eliminate education as an obligation of the State (EPW May 1998); such a situation should not come so easily by in our country.

There is a strong case for ensuring autonomy for the education budget. Some sanctity should be attached to the core provision, and such factors as the teacher's salaries being charged on Consolidated Fund of States could be considered. In a study of elementary education in Gujarat, The Indian Institute of Management had made one such recommendation to protect the salaries of

elementary school teachers and their budget. In fact, there is a case for **a special provision in the Constitution for protecting the service condition of teachers, as in the case of Civil Servants as contained in Articles 311 and 312.** There should be also a provision to ensure their political neutrality as in the case of civil servants, as most of the teachers are paid by the state. In Germany, all teachers are paid directly from State funds. A similar provision for recruitment through a Public Service Commission could also be considered. In short, the kind of autonomy granted to Judicial Institutions could be extended to teachers and teaching institutions. This does not mean that government should give money and sit back. Government has to function as an involved and engaged critic of education as of all other institutions in the society.

There is need for a regular Education Commission like a Finance Commission, reporting to Parliament to review and update the systems. A Constitutional Provision similar to that of the Finance Commission can be considered. It is interesting to look back and note that the 1913 Government of India Education Policy had envisaged such a regular body.

Excerpts from Education Related Articles from Constitutions of Selected Countries

United Kingdom "Constitution" - Part 8 Social Rights
Section 28 Education, Science, and the Arts

(1) **Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be Compulsory.** Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(4) **The state education system is free**, but a small proportion of Children attend private fee-paying schools. Local education authorities have to meet the parents' wishes unless the school is full or, if selective, the child does not meet required academic standards. Secondary schools - those catering for 11- to 16-year-olds - in England and Wales are required to admit pupils up to the limit of their available physical capacity if there is sufficient demand on behalf of eligible children by parents.

Taiwan - Constitution - Chapter XIII Fundamental National Politics
Section 5 Education and Culture

Article 159

All citizens shall have an equal opportunity to receive education.

Article 160

(1) **All children of school age from six to twelve years shall receive free elementary education. Those from poor families shall be supplied with books by the Government.**

(2) All citizens above school age who have not received elementary education shall receive supplementary education free of charge and shall also be supplied with books by the Government.

Spain - Constitution - Chapter II Rights and Freedoms
Article 27 [Education]

(1) **Everyone has the right to education.** Freedom of instruction is Recognized.

(2) The objective of education shall be the full development of the human personality in respect for the democratic principles of coexistence and the basic rights and liberties.

(4) **Basic education is obligatory and free.**

(5) The public authorities guarantee the right of all to education through a general educational program, with the effective participation of all the sectors affected, and the creation of educational centers.

Paraguay - Constitution - Title II Rights, Duties, and Guaranties
Article 73 The Right to Education and its Goals

Everyone has the right to a comprehensive, permanent education system, conceived as a process within the cultural context of the community. The system is designed to promote the full development of human personality, to preserve freedom and peace, to promote social justice, solidarity, cooperation, and integration of all peoples, and to strengthen our commitment to the fatherland and our cultural identity. It also seeks to promote the intellectual, moral, and civic growth of the individual, as well as the elimination of any educational programs of a discriminatory nature. **The elimination of illiteracy and the implementation of job training programs are permanent objectives of the educational system.**

Japan - Constitution - Chapter III Rights and Duties of the People
Article 26 [Right to Education, Compulsory Education]

(1) All people shall have the right to receive an equal education correspondent to their ability, as provided by law.

(2) **All people shall be obligated to have all boys and girls under their protection receive ordinary education as provided for by law.**

(3) **Such compulsory education shall be free.**

China - Constitution - Chapter One General Principles

Article 19 [Education]

(2) **The state runs schools of various types, makes primary education compulsory and universal, develops secondary, vocational and higher education, and promotes pre-school education.**

(3) The state develops educational facilities of various types in order to **wipe out illiteracy** and provide political, cultural, scientific, technical, and professional education for workers, peasants, state functionaries and other working people. It encourages people to become educated through independent study.

Indian constitution

Part III Fundamental Rights

Article 28 Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions

Article 30 Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions

Part IV Directive Principles of State Policy

Article 41 Right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases

Article 45 Provision for free and compulsory education for children

Article 46 Promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other weaker sections

Part XVI Special Provisions Relating to Certain Classes

Article 337 Special provision with respect to educational grants for the benefit of Anglo-Indian community

