CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Literacy is a key lever of change and a practical tool of empowerment on each of the three main pillars of sustainable development: economic development, social development and Environmental protection”.

- Kofi Annan

Literacy is an indispensable component of human resource development. It is fundamental to social and economic progress of a nation. It greatly contributes to the improvement in the quality of life of a population, particularly with regard to life expectancy, infant mortality, learning levels and nutritional levels of children. Higher level of literacy and educational development lead to greater awareness on the one hand and help people to acquire new skills on the other (Education for All India, 2011).

Literacy is a person’s first step in learning and knowledge building and therefore, literacy should be an indicator for any measurement of human development (Dhandapani and Murugan, 2007). The UNDP has been providing the Human Development Index (HDI) since 1990, which subsequently became the most well-known aggregate measure to the wellbeing of a nation. The HDI combined three dimensions of development, viz., living a long and healthy life, being educated, and having a decent standard of living in the aggregate index. Under the previous HDI formula, health was measured by life expectancy at birth; education or knowledge by a combination of the adult literacy rate and school enrolment rates (from primary through university years); and income or standard of living by GDP per capita adjusted for purchasing-power parity (PPP US$) (Deb,2015). India’s ranking on Human Development Index was 136/186, 135/187,130/188, as reported in the UNDP Human Development Report (2013, 2014 and 2015). The low status of India in the developmental ranking of the nations at international level and the slow pace of improvement in the country’s position over the very recent three year period speak of the need and urgency to
intensify activities in all dimensions of human development with strong foundation laid in literacy and education (Singh and Gupta, 2013).

Oyitso and Olomukoro (2012), and Thiele (2013) claim that Education, formal or non-formal, is the foremost agent of empowerment. A one-year increase in the average educational attainment of a country’s population increases annual per capita GDP growth from 2 per cent to 2.5 per cent (UNESCO, 2014). According to Negi and Dhoundiyal (2012), the illiterates are only half-developed human beings. They can contribute only little more than their physical power for the betterment of the nation. In an era when technology has shrunk the world into a global village and when information has been brought to the fingertips of a small section of society, it would be unfortunate if the masses were denied access to basic information due to their inability to read and write. Adults may recognise a need to improve their literacy skills when they start a new job, when their children start school and want to help them with homework, when a relationship ends, or when they lose their usual forms of employment.

Societal changes demanding new skills in literacy and numeracy may include economic or forced migration, industrialisation and the passing of subsistence economies and traditional forms of labour, social and economic development, and deepening of democracy (Abideen and Oladiran, 2013). The cost of illiteracy to the global economy is estimated at US $1.19 trillion. More than 796 million people globally cannot read and write. The cumulative loss of illiteracy to the economies of developing countries has been $ 5076.48 billion. The Indian economy alone is losing $53.56 billion annually (World Literacy Foundation Report, 2012).

In India, out of the 1210.6 million population, consisting 623.1 million male and 587.5 million female, only 763.5 million (434.6 million male and 328.9 million female) are literate (Keshewrani, 2014). The literacy trends of the States/UTs present quite a diversified pattern. The literates constitute 74.04 per cent for all persons, 82.14 per cent for males and 65.46 per cent for females (Census of India, 2011). Thus, only three-fourths of the population aged 7 years and above
is literate in the country. In other words, four out of every five males and two out of every three females in the country are literate. The females in the country lag behind their male counterparts in literacy attainment.

The literacy rate reported for the rural areas of India for males was 78.5 per cent and 58.7 per cent for females. In the urban areas, the literacy scenario was better with 89.6 per cent reported for males and 79.9 per cent for females (Census of India, 2011). The low literacy rate for the females and further among the rural population call for immediate action for promoting literacy status of rural women.

According to the Gender Achievements and Prospects in Education report (GAP, 2005) “Illiteracy is a catastrophe for any child, but particularly devastating for girls. Girls who are denied education are more vulnerable to poverty, hunger, violence, abuse, exploitation, trafficking, HIV/AIDS and other diseases and maternal mortality. If they become mothers, there is a greater chance that they will bequeath illiteracy and poverty to the next generation” (Cited in Yadava, 2009). The poorest young women are projected to achieve universal literacy only in 2072 (UNESCO, 2014). Though remedial and curative actions are available for the support of women in difficult circumstances, the powerless women deprived of education and allied potentials including capacity to take decisions become victims of deprivations and most of them die in the young age itself. The vicious cycle of deprivation and apathy of women can be broken down only through their literacy and educational empowerment.

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015) has reported that about 757 million adults around the world cannot read or write a simple sentence and women are the first to be denied these basic skills. UIS data confirm the need for renewed and more targeted initiatives to increase adult and youth literacy rates and to achieve the goals that were missed by 2015. For this reason, the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 contain a new literacy target: “By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.”
Literacy goes beyond reading, writing and numeracy and includes communicative practices, critical thinking, active citizenship, individual rights and improving the quality of life (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong learning, 2010). South and West Asia is home to more than one-half of the global illiterate population (51%). In addition, 25 per cent of all illiterate adults live in sub-Saharan Africa, 12 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific, seven per cent in the Arab States and four per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is estimated that less than one per cent of the global illiterate population live in the remaining regions combined (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015).

India is slightly better in terms of adult illiteracy rates, but owing to the size of the population, still leads by a huge margin when it comes to absolute number of illiterate adults: India has about 287 to 300 million illiterate adults, way ahead of the next two countries on the list – China with 62 million and Pakistan with 50 million illiterate adults (UIS, 2012). In fact, India’s illiterate adults form about 57 to 60 per cent of the illiterate adult population of the Asia Pacific Region (507 million). This is a cause for alarm and a call to action. UNESCO’s Education For All (EFA) targets aim to bring down the number of adult illiterates in India to about 135 million by 2015. The illiteracy rate in India has come down from 35 per cent of the total population in 2001 to 26 per cent by 2011. i.e around 273 millions: males 97 million and females 176 millions (Census of India, 2011).

Historically, women had a much lower literacy rate than men in India. From the British period to India’s independence, literate women accounted for only two to six per cent of the total female population. During the pre-Independence time, literacy rate for women had a very poor spurt in comparison to literacy rate of men. This is witnessed from the fact that literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7 % to 7.3 % where as the literacy rate of men has risen from 9.8 per cent to 24.9 per cent during the four decades from 1901-1951. During the post-independence period literacy rates have shown a substantial increase in general and particularly in women. Surprisingly the female literacy rate has increased at a faster pace than the male literacy during the decade 1981-2011. The growth is
almost six times e.g. 7.9 per cent in 1951 and 65.46 per cent in 2011 (Census of India, 2011).

With more than 252 million illiterate women, clearly India has failed to tap into half of its human resources. Referring to a UNESCO 2012 report, Oyitso and Olomukoro (2012) stated that, there is now the realization that sustainable human development cannot be effective if half of the human race (the womenfolk) remain ignorant, marginalized and discriminated against (Punteney and Tan, 2013).

The UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon has said that if women are empowered through literacy, considering their multiple roles in the society, they will contribute greatly to the development of the nation. Women need greater access to educational opportunities, skill acquisition and positions of authority to be truly empowered (Oyitso and Olomukoro, 2012). Literacy programs, with a link to financial opportunities can improve the living conditions of women; and, allow women to participate in processes that will enhance their development at home, in the community and at national levels. Basic literacy education is linked to acquisition of skills, access to information regarding health, nutrition status, legal rights and financial services, enhancing women’s development socially, economically and politically.

UNDP’s Human Development Reports have estimated the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) since 1995. The GEM focuses on opportunities and captures gender inequality in three key areas: ‘Political participation and decision-making power’, as measured by women’s and men’s percentage shares of parliamentary seats; ‘Economic participation and decision-making power’, as measured by two indicators – women’s and men’s percentage shares of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers and women’s and men’s percentage shares of professional and technical positions; and ‘Power over economic resources’, as measured by women’s and men’s estimated earned income (PPP US$). The GEM was intended to measure women’s and men’s abilities to participate actively in economic and political life and their command over economic resources (Indian Institute of
Public Administration, 2009). Educational status and standards of women do contribute indirectly to each of these developmental measures.

The gender disparities remain large in several regions but the disparities become even more apparent by examining the Gender Parity Index (GPI), which is calculated by dividing the female literacy rate by the male literacy rate. A GPI value below one earns that the female literacy rate is below the male literacy rate, while values between 0.97 and 1.03 are generally interpreted to indicate gender parity. Three regions – the Arab States, South and West Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa – are far from gender parity. In South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, GPI values of 0.76 for the adult literacy rate indicate that women aged 15 years and older are 24 per cent less likely to be literate than men in the same age group. At the global level, women aged 15 years and older are 9 per cent less likely to be literate than men, and young women between 15 and 24 years are 4 per cent less likely to be literate (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015).

Some of the successful stories which had helped women empowerment, communities and economies from across the world have been: **Women only**: Literacy and Life skills in Indonesia and Sahajani Shiksha Kendra (claiming employment rights with literacy for poor women in India). **Women and Family**: Family literacy in Turkey; **Women and Community**: Raising voices; speaking up for participation in Nepal; Women and Literacy in post-conflict in Sierra Leone; Tostan: Community Empowerment in Senegal and seven other African countries; **Women and Health/Nutrition**: Children’s nutrition and literacy learning in Senegal; learning reading, writing and health in Brazil; bilingual literacy and reproductive health in Bolivia. Nigeria shared the experience of successful implementation of literacy programme through **community radio**. The programmes especially for women in Indonesia to create a literate world are the writing culture improvement through Mothers Newspaper (**Koran Ibu**), Children Newspaper (**Koran Anak**); entrepreneurship literacy; women empowerment oriented life skills learning (National Literacy Mission Authority, 2013).
There is a significant relationship between literacy and development. Literacy benefits both individuals and communities. It transforms people, communities and the entire social structure and is a key to socio-economic development. Literate societies interact and contribute in development. Literacy level and educational attainment are vital indicators of development in a society (Shah, 2013).

One of the benefits of increased education is that educated parents are likely to have educated children. Analysis of household surveys from 56 countries found that, for each additional year of the mother’s education, the average child attains an extra 0.32 years, and for girls the benefit is slightly larger (UNESCO, 2014). Literacy is an essential determinant of the quality of life. By enhancing cognitive skills, literacy enables fuller development of human potential, and helps to promote a sense of self-worth and dignity (Kapur and Murthi, 2009).

**Efforts towards Adult Literacy at National level**

A new thrust was given to adult literacy in the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and the Plan of Action 1992, which advocated a three-pronged strategy of adult education, elementary education, and non-formal education to eradicate illiteracy (Yadava, 2009). The Program of Action (POA – 1992) under the National Policy on Education states that education can be an effective tool for women’s empowerment. The Mahila Samakhya (MS) program, launched in 1988 in pursuance of the goals of the NPE and the POA was a concrete program for the education and empowerment of women and girls in rural areas (Rizwana, 2009). The National Literacy Mission (NLM) was set up in 1988 with an initial target to make 80 million persons literate by 1995 which was later enhanced to achieving a threshold level of 75 per cent by 2007 to cover all districts. Saakshar Bharat or People’s Programme, a centrally sponsored scheme of Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL) under the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India (GOI) was launched in 2009 and its operation from 1st October, 2009. Saakshar Bharat
envisages making 60 million non-literate women and 10 million non-literate men literate by 2017 (Saakshar Bharat, 2013).

**Literacy for Women above 35+**

As per Census data (2011), there were 159 million non-literates in India in the 35+ age group. Nearly 60 per cent of them were women. The majority of them have limited opportunities for literacy development. Unless attended, their number will mask the progress of the nation in eliminating illiteracy among the population.

As stated in the Report of Four x 4 Empowering people (2011), 35+ age group in India are not covered under the National Adult Education Programme. The report underscores that the measure of adult literacy used in the literacy programme is not an adequate indicator of the level of functional literacy that is required for the new programme using computer-based self-learning system for the 35+ age group and advocates this programme as a national mission for acquiring skills for reading a newspaper. It envisages that such a mission would make India cent per cent literate within five years.

National Report for CONFINTEA VI (2008) reported that literacy programmes cover illiterate/neo-literate persons in the age group of 15-35 only. There are about 31 crore illiterate persons as per census 2001 and a very sizeable proportion is in the age group of 35 years and above and remain uncovered under literacy programmes. Considering significant improvements in the life expectancy, the report suggests launching of a new scheme as a part of the literacy programmes operated through NGOs to impart functional literacy to 35 plus age group to eradicate illiteracy. The Mid Term Appraisal of the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) had also suggested the need for covering the illiterates in 35+ age group. This recommendation has been included by NLM under the Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012).

Motkuri (2013) reported that the policy intervention through adult literacy programmes can change the situation and can improve the literacy levels among the adults where a large stock of illiterates lies. However, for the adult literacy
programmes especially under the National Literacy Mission (NLM), illiterate population of 15-35 years age is the target age group. A large stock of illiterates who were not in this age group and had crossed 35 years of age and entered into 35+ age population will remain as illiterates till their mortality. Moreover, if the adult literacy programmes can be extended to the 35 to 60 years group and implemented at least for a period of five from 2012, India can achieve cent percent literacy rate by 2050.

Need for the Study

To read and write is very important for women basically while receiving courier and registered post, when purchasing grocery items from departmental store and ration shop and cooking ready to eat foods. Women who are the members of Self-Help Groups need to travel for training and banking transactions from their locality to city. They must know the name plate of bus and fill up the Credit/Debit form in bank. For this, ability to read and write is a must.

With 1/3rd of reservation for women in the Local Self Governance, women’s participation in the local governance is increasing. But in many cases, their husbands do the activities of their position at the village panchayat level. Mostly, these women are voiceless and follow their husbands’ guidance and act like dolls because of illiteracy and lack of awareness. Suriakanthi (2000) reports that in fifty percent of the Self-Help Groups surveyed, members expressed the necessity of imparting basic education to all members of Self-Help Groups. Only literate members prepare the minutes and accounts on behalf of the office bearers who are illiterate.

Majority of the women participating in MGNREGA work for their economic development, the salary of the MGNREGA worker is paid through bank. Women have to write their name and put signature while receiving salary. In rural areas, petty shops are run mostly by women. They need to write the name of grocery items and do some calculations. Most of these women are in their forties and early fifties. Until and unless opportunities are provided to these women to
acquire basic literacy and facilities for continued education, sustainable changes cannot be expected in the lives of poor rural women.

Many strategies have been tried to impart literacy to illiterate women. However, in order to teach literacy to women above 35 years, special strategies have to be worked out. These women would be benefitted better if the facilitator is someone from the same locality and someone related to the learner. It would be all the more beneficial if the Literacy Facilitator is the learner’s own daughter or a close relative.

Like the strategies used to make women literate many methods of teaching literacy have also been adopted worldwide and in India. The Traditional Method is based on grouping of the letters according to the similarity of their shapes and also associating them with pictures and words. In The Alphabetic Method letters having similar structure are grouped on each page of the primer for enabling the adults to learn to write the letters with ease. Each one Teach one Method is based on the concept of individualized instruction and only one person is made literate by an instructor. The Letter Method is also known as Integrated Literacy Method since its approach is almost /mostly eclectic and synthetic. The letter is introduced as the basic unit and then used in the meaningful words. In Laubach Method, simple charts representing a phrase, a word and the first letters of the same are used by the instructor. In Synthetic Method, first of all the learners are asked to form words by joining of letters or sounds and making of sentences is taught by joining the words (Alphabets - words-sentences). Analytical Method, starts from sentences and then proceeds to words (Kundu, 1986). Word Method was used for teaching letters to the learners through words (George, 2004). Morphological sequencing is another method used for teaching words (Saranya, 2008). It can be viewed as the process of building words by inflection and word-formation. It deals with all combinations that form words or parts of words.

The experimental study has been attempted by the researcher taking special care to observe the basic requirements of Andragogy: flexibility in the class timings and venue, familiarity with the teacher, class strength and curriculum but
with a difference only in the method of teaching the language. Morphological Sequencing was the method chosen for training the learners to read and write Tamil, the mother tongue of the learners. Not many studies have been done on the efficacy of teaching letters by morphological sequencing. If found useful, this method can be used profitably with adult illiterates.

The study also attempts to analyse the ease of using the basic primer in Tamil prepared by morphological sequencing procedure for teaching adult learners to read and write Tamil. Further, the study looks for the advantages of using learning aids to optimise learning along with the primer to facilitate and implement effectively the teaching programme for the illiterate women in educationally backward villages. The study attempts to capitalise on the benefits of using school students as Literacy Facilitators who are often close relatives of the learner, under the supervision of local youth and the participation of village representatives to keep vigil over the programme implementation.

**Scope of the Study**

The present study, a field experiment on imparting literacy, was taken up in seven Village Panchayats in Athoor Block of Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu. The Village Panchayats chosen included Ambathurai, Alamarathupatti, Thoppampatti, Pillaiyarnatham, Pithalaipatti, Kalikampatti and Vakkampatti. Totally 180 learners were involved in the experiment. The learners were all in the age group 35-55 years. The study took about 10 months time. In teaching literacy a primer prepared on morphological sequencing method was used. The Literacy Facilitators were the local school children. There were 90 Literacy Facilitators and 10 Literacy Education Supervisors. Besides the primer, teaching aids like Manual, Exercise book, Card, and Alphabet Card holder were used to impart literacy. The study was done in two phases. The first phase primarily included teaching literacy. The second phase included post literacy using a booklet prepared by the Researcher on the themes of Nutrition, Health and Environment.
Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study is to empower rural women of selected panchayats in the age group of 35-55 years through basic literacy skills and continuing education.

The Specific Objectives of the Study are:

1. To prepare the general profile of the selected village panchayat to identify low literacy level.
2. To assess the literacy status of the women population of selected village panchayats.
3. To develop learning aids for imparting basic literacy and post literacy.
4. To select and train Literacy Facilitators in the use of learning materials.
5. To conduct post literacy education for select groups of rural women.
6. To find out the efficacy of teaching letters through morphological sequencing method.
7. To evaluate the methodology followed for imparting literacy skills.

Delimitations of the Study

1. Pre and post assessment of learning literacy was done on a single primer namely, “Ezhythu Tamil Eilu Nalil” (Write Tamil in Seven Days) in all the five villages.

2. Focus was given only to reading and writing skills and not to numeracy.

Arrangement of Chapters

The first Chapter is the Introduction. This chapter presents the background information that supports taking up this particular study. More specifically, it gives the status of women and their literacy level in the world and in India. Also it gives the reasons for the urgent need to impart literacy to women above 35 years. The scope of the study, the objectives, limitations and delimitations find a place in Introduction.

Chapter II reviews the related literature. This chapter reviews studies related to the position of women in the world, their economic, social and political
development, importance of literacy for women and literacy efforts taken in the world as well as India.

Chapter III gives a descriptive picture of the Methodology followed in the present study. Specifically, the chapter includes sub topics namely, statement of the problem, definition of terms, area of study, sample studied, selection of sample, phases of literacy education in the present study including monitoring and evaluation.

Chapter IV is titled Results and Discussion. With the aid of tables, figures, maps and statistical tools the data are analysed and presented. The following are the sub topics of this chapter: Demographic profile of the Village Panchayats under the study, Profile of the study population at Panchayat level, Profile of the study population at Village level, Profile of the villages chosen for the field experiment, Field Experiment-Background of the women learners chosen for the Field experiment, Background of the Literacy Facilitators and Literacy Education Supervisors chosen for the experiment. Implementation of the Literacy Programme Field Experiment: Level I: Basic Literacy Programme, Field Experiment: Level II: Post literacy Programme, Evaluation of the literacy programme, Factors associated with the pace of Literacy of the learners, Knowledge Level of the Learners on Nutrition and Health and Environmental Education, Knowledge categorisation of the Learners. Multivariate Analysis of Variance, Opinion of the partners of the Literacy Experimentation of the programme, Suggestions for improvement of the literacy programme.

Chapter V presents the summary of the study; the conclusions arrived at, recommendations based on the study and suggestions for future studies.