CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTS OF LITERACY: AN OVERVIEW

Education refers to the process of imparting or acquiring knowledge and of developing the capacity of reasoning. Literacy, according to us is the fundamental means through which education is acquired or imparted. The dichotomy, which we are led to believe, exists between education and literacy is false for theoretically it is impossible to maintain a distinction between literacy in a meaningful sense and education (Mukherjee 2003: 6). Education carried with itself, implicitly or explicitly, the notion of literacy. They are concepts so closely intertwined that it is sometimes impossible to separate one and talk about the other.

1.1. History of education in India

From the simple beginning of poetic flights of the Vedic age to the brains behind the buzz word Microsoft today, there has been an uninterrupted succession of teachers and scholars in India. Since the Vedic ages literacy has been present in the country in some form or the other. There were preliterate societies in Sumer, Egypt and India; education in India was present even in the basic and formative period of Indian cultural history. A study of Vedas and Brahmanas as well as the Upanishads reveals the contribution of Indian mind in various fields – Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine, Philosophy and Religion - which even today draws the attention of intellectuals of the East and West.
The history of India may be divided into the following sections or periods (Srivastava 1993:28):

I. Ancient Period (1200 B.C –5 AD)

Up to about 1000 B.C. when most of the Vedic literature was composed, every person male or female was required to undergo the discipline of ‘Brahmacharya’, where one was initiated into the sacred literature. Learning in ancient India was imparted by the teacher to the pupils who gathered around him and came to live in his house as members of the family. The family functioned as a domestic school, an Ashram, or a hermitage where the mental faculties of the pupils were developed (India 2000: 38). Great stress was laid on the individual’s capacity to memorize, recite, and explain the religious hymns; developing creative intellect, debating powers and developing a spirit of enquiry. It was the father who used to educate the children. The education system produced youth grounded in religious literature, and related intellect and efficient in the family profession.

i) Vedic age (1200 B.C. – 200 B.C.)

From 1200 to 200 B.C., with the extensiveness of Vedic literature, complexity of rituals and the growth of new branches of learning, the professional teacher became a special feature. The brahamcharis had to leave his home and go to live with his new ‘father’, the guru. What existed then was the gurukul system which had the following features:
a. Residential

b. Free and frank discussions between the teachers and the intending pupil to assess merits and demerits of the brahamcharis.

c. The pupils were taught dignity of labour

d. The main method of teaching was learning the entire literature by heart, followed by discussion.

e. There were also women scholars like Gargi and Maitri in this period.

Professional education on a hereditary basis was carried on. This was a creative epoch characterized by the development of metaphysics, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, metallurgy and of philosophic and political thought.

ii) Dharmashtra period (200 BC – 500 AD):

From 200 B.C. to A.D. 500, a systematic discussion of the aims and methods of education was available. The age was of critical reflection and rational outlook. Specialization in different branches had started and values of new discoveries were realized.

iii) Buddhist education (556-480 AD):

Buddhist Samgha as organized by Buddha developed into centres of learning. It did not impart only Buddhist studies but also Vedic and Brahmanical for comparison sake at least. There were two ordinations for entering the order:

a. Prabbajja, the preparatory ordination at the age of 8.
b. **Upasampada**, the final ordination at the age of 20.

Medical education was compulsory and begging for alms, devotion to teacher and personal services by the student to the teacher were recommended. Buddhist monasteries developed into corporate educational institutions, and some like *Nalanda*, *Valabhi* and *Vikramshila* became ‘international’ centres of learning.

iv) The Mauryan Period (272 BC – 232 AD):

This period reached its acme under the reign of Ashoka from 272 B.C. to 232 A.D. He was devoted to the practice of *Dharma* and its propagation amongst his people. His instructions on morality and everyday mundane business engraved on innumerable stone pillars, rocks, cave walls were written in Sanskrit. These were intended to be read and understood by the general public and their existence presupposes a widely diffused knowledge of writing and a high percentage of literacy.

Under the Mauryan kings, schools and higher educational institutions were maintained by State and public charities.

During the Maurayan period, there developed universities or great seats of learning among which *Takshashila (Taxila)* was the most famous. The subjects taught at *Takshashila* were literature, grammar, metrics, poetics, logic and philosophy, and also scientific subjects, such as, medicine, military science, astronomy, astrology, mathematics, politics, economics and mechanical arts of various descriptions (Srivastava 1993: 287). The country placed before itself a threefold educational object (Srivastava 1993: 288). They are:
i. The acquisition of knowledge.

ii. The training in the discharge of social and religious duties.

iii. The formation of character.

Education was imparted not only by books and lectures, but by the percept and example by the gurus in the ashrams and in the university.

(Srivastava 1993: 288)

v) The reign of Kanishka: (120 A.D – 143 A.D.)

During his reign from 120 A.D. to 143 A.D. a big Buddhist council was convened in Kashmir, which was attended by more than 500 Buddhist scholars. A thorough examination of theological literature from the remote antiquity was made and an encyclopedia of Buddhist philosophy, Mahavibhsha, was prepared.

vi) The Golden Period (3rd to 5th C):

The Guptas who ruled during the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries were of literary taste and patronized scholars. Great scholars like Kalidasa, Dandin and Kumar Bhatt flourished during this period. The Dharma Shastras, Manava Dharma Shastra belong to this period. Medical sciences received a lot of patronage and in the field of literature there were new developments like the court Epic, drama, lyric, poetry and fables. The kings supported the teachers by granting villages. Fourteen subjects comprised the syllabus, which included the four Vedas, six Vedangas, the Puranas, Mimangsaa, Nyaya (Justice) and dharma (roughly translated as Duty).
During the ancient period the enthusiasm of the ruler played a major role in the development of education. For a time the indigenous system of education was deprived of royal support and patronage which was now directed to the promotion of new Islamic learning.

II. Medieval period (India under Mughals: 9th AD to 1765)

India under the Mughals could show nothing approaching the system of primary and secondary education, which is encouraged and directed by some modern democratic governments; but neither could England nor any other western countries in the time of the Tudors claim to have progressed very far in this direction. The Mughal government did not consider it to be its duty to educate the people. It had no department of education and did not allocate a portion of the public revenue for the spread of literacy. In all Muslim countries education was not controlled by the state and ‘any person who was qualified and felt the urge could set himself up as a teacher’ (Edwardees and Garrett 1979: 215). It was rather a matter of private individuals who set up educational institutions out of their own initiative and interest for the spread of education in a limited section of society, and no government, either Hindu or Muslim, considered it to be its duty to promote public education, as do the modern governments (Chitnis 1979:118). Nevertheless, the Muslim government established some schools for the Muslims, subsidized some others of the same community and controlled and guided practically all the Muslim educational institutions. The education was under the chief sadr, whose duty was to ensure
for a state a regular supply of learned Muslim divines, such as, qazis, muftis, mir adls, muhatasibs and other administrators (Srivastava 1993: 289).

The Indian universities, which had provided the best education known to the ancient world, fell a prey to the onslaught of Islam. Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila and other universities disappeared one by one in the 11th century, the end of the 12th and the beginning of 13th century (Srivastava 1993:288). Under the Sultans, the Muslim system of education, which already existed outside India, was brought to the country. The system consisted of three types of institutions: -

i. Maktabs (ii) Khanqabs or schools attached to the mosques (iii) madrasas

The first two types were elementary institutions, which taught reading and writing of Arabic and Persian. The pupils were required to memorize the Quran. The khanqas imparted instructions in mystic philosophy and the Sufi way of life. The curriculum followed in the madrasas of the Sulatanate period was borrowed from the Islamic countries outside India. Great stress was laid on theology and the main subjects taught were: Tafsir (exegesis), Hadis (traditions), and Fiqh (jurisprudence). The non-theological subjects taught were grammar, literature, logic and Muslim scholasticism (Kalam). The Sirat-I-Firuz Shahi gives the following list of 14 subjects, which were taught in the madrasas established by Firuz Shah Tuglaq:
From the time of Illtutmish to the days of Sikander Lodi traditional subjects occupied a more important place than the rationalistic subjects. A change however took place when Shaikh Abdullah and his brother Shaikh Azizullah of Multan came to Delhi at the invitation of Sikander Lodi (India 2000:121). They introduced the study of philosophy and logic in the curriculum of the day, and thus reduced the religious bias of the existing system. For the first time during the
rule of *Sikander Lodi* (1489-1517), Hindus were permitted to join *maktab* (Srivastava 1993:290). The Hindus now took to learning the Persian language, and a Hindu scholar, *brahmana* by name, instructed Muslims (India 2000:122). Significant though these steps were they did not bring about any fundamental change in the content of the Muslim education in India.

During the reign of *Babar* and *Humayun* little change was made in the educational system except that both were great scholars and lovers of literature and art. In fact all the Mughal rulers were scholars and lovers of literature and arts (Khurana 1993: 269). *Babur* and *Humayun* were lovers of education. *Babur* established a *madarsa* in Delhi in which besides theology, mathematics, geography and astrology were taught. *Babur* himself was a man of high literary tastes and ‘was endowed with a fastidious critical perception and was an accomplished Persian poet and in his native *Turki* was a master of pure and unaffected style, alike in prose and poetry (Edwardees and Garret 1979: 225). He is famous for his memoirs and is called the prince of diarists; through his works he stands revealed as a man of deep culture and artistic tastes (Quershi 1979: 63). He even initiated a kind of handwriting called the *Babari* hand and indicted a copy of the *Quran* in that script and sent it to Mecca. *Humayun* also founded *madarsas* in Agra and Delhi and he used to establish contact with learned men on Thursdays and Saturdays.

Before the rule of *Akbar*, his predecessor built a few *madrasas*, but it was only during his reign that education received a great impetus. *Akbar* himself was
uneducated but he took keen interest in the progress of education and established various maktabs and madarasas. During his time a lot of schools, primary and secondary were opened. He reformed the curriculum and included certain important subjects such as science of morals, social behaviour, arithmetic, agriculture, menstruation, geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, foretelling, household economy, public administration, medicine, logic history etc. the medium of instruction was Persian. In teaching the language the teacher had to concentrate on five things:

   a. Knowledge of letters
   b. Meaning of words
   c. Hemistich
   d. The verse
   e. Repetition

The mogul rulers after Akbar did not take the same degree of interest in the state schools established by him, though some of these schools were subsidized by the state and allowed to function. These schools however were not meant for the education of public nor were any aid provided to the schools established by a private agency. Education during the period was a private affair. Jahangir took a keen interest in the development of education and he ordered that if a man died without successor all his property should be utilized for the development of schools and colleges (Khurana 1993: 270). He also got repaired
all those schools which were not being used for educational purposes and thus contributed to its expansion.

Private schools existed in almost every village and a school was invariably attached to every temple or mosque. The Hindus introduced their children to regular education at the age of five and the Muslims usually performed the maktab ceremony of their children at the age of four years, four months and four days.

Barring the poor people engaged in agriculture or menial service all Hindu children were sent to school to learn reading writing and arithmetic. Unlike the Hindus, the Muslims in general did not display the same enthusiasm for the education of their children. Maktabs were primary schools meant for the beginners and maintained by maulvis. There were no printed primers and the children were made to write letters of the alphabet and figures on the wooden boards. In Muslim schools the Quran was invariably taught to every child who had to learn it by heart where as in the Hindu schools lessons from Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Puranas were compulsory. Here too the child was expected to memorize the lines from the scriptures. Much attention was paid to elementary arithmetic and there was in vogue an interesting way of committing to memory the multiples of numerals called paharas (the present day multiplication tables).

Good handwriting was emphasized upon and calligraphy was practiced. In the primary and secondary schools it was not necessary to study for a fixed
number of years. The teacher was the sole judge to test the efficiency of a student in a particular subject. There was no examination system at that time. Yusuf Hussain, a historian writes, “Students were promoted from a lower to higher class according to the opinion of the teacher concerned who took into account the total academic career of the students whom they knew very intimately.” (as cited in Khurana1993: 270).

The basic feature of Muslim educational system was that it was traditional in spirit and theological in content. The curriculum was broadly divided into two categories: (India 2000: 120): -

a. Manqualt or traditional sciences which included subjects like exegesis (Tafsir), traditions (Mantiq), Law (Fiqh), History and Literature,

b. Ma’qulat or rational Sciences under which were included subjects like logic (Mantiq), philosophy (Hikmat), medicine (Tibb), Mathematics (Riyadi) and Astronomy (Hai’at).

Badaoni, in his book Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, which included biographies of eminent persons, differentiates the sciences, which require the exercise of reasoning faculty (such as philosophy, astronomy, incantations and mechanics) from the rest of the subjects which depend upon memory (Chopra 2000: 144).

Female education during the Mogul period was confined to the royal family and the upper class women. Girls did not attend schools; instead tutors were employed. They were taught literature, elementary arithmetic and religious
scriptures.

III. Modern period (India under British: 1765 - 1947)

With the advent of the British rule, primary education in India underwent a change. During the early years of the 19th century, the government of the East India Company followed a policy of indifference in the matter of education, which was not regarded as a part of the responsibility of a commercial company. The traditional educational system of pathshalas and madarsas suffered a decline. The forces, which compelled the Britishers into a position of passivity towards education, were: -

i. India, which at that time comprised of many states and princely kingdoms had come under the suzerainty of East India Company not by conquest but by subsidiary system. The Company was to protect each of its feudatories against external invasions and internal rebellion; and they in turn were to be free to exercise to the full internal sovereignty and civic administration. Political peace secured by the dominance of the British and the alliance of the princes did not always guarantee civic and internal peace. Therefore the first decade of the East India Company was spent in maintaining political order and trying to strengthen their power in the India.

ii. Education and the study of letters with the Hindus and Mohammedans were associated with their respective religions. A new system of education would
certainly undermine their traditional religion and both the communities would not have liked outsiders to interfere with their religion.

iii. There was a strong belief amongst the Britishers that India had fallen into their hands basically because of the ignorance of the people and that to educate them was to pave their own expulsion from the country.

On the other hand there were forces, which led the Britishers to adopt some educational responsibility. Firstly, there was a school of political philosophers who held the opinion that among all sources of difficulty in British administration and of possible danger to the stability to their government the ignorance of the people was a serious one. Secondly, there were repeated appeals from the Christian missionaries on behalf of western education for the natives. The missionary advocated universal learning of the western language and literature so that everybody might have the right of reading “God’s” word. Further, there was a desire shown by the ‘intellectual’ and ‘aristocratic’ classes among the natives for western education – the language of their conquerors, which gave them a peculiar social prestige. A few schools and colleges were already springing up owned by private natives, missionaries and individual Britishers. Finally, there was the need by the British government for native administrative assistants, educated in English to help carry on the work of British government.
It was only in 1882 that the Education Commission showed that the promises of the Despatch of 1854, that the primary education was responsibility of the government, had not been realized. The Commission urged the government to devote their attention and revenue increasingly to the promotion of primary education. The Education department of the government of India was created in 1910. At the time it started, this department was confined not only to control of education but also included sanitation, local self-government, ecclesiastical nature, archeology and museums.

Education was classified under two broad heads – Public and Private. ‘Public’ education was given in ‘public schools’, which were defined as institutions giving secular education, and such institutions must confirm to the standard of efficiency prescribed by the government and follow the approved course of instructions (Chinappa 1988:106). The significance of the term ‘public’ lies in the fact that the instructions given in these institutions were general and the institution was open to anybody regardless of caste, colour or creed and that they were supported wholly or partly by the fund raised among the people at large. ‘Private’ education was given in ‘private’ institutions many of which were intended to impart religious instructions of different kinds and orient learning, and they give so little secular teaching that the State cannot take account of them.

The kind of education given and the different managing bodies are shown in this diagram (Chinappa 1988: 107).
The Indian Education Commission of 1882 defined primary education as the instruction of the masses through the vernacular in such subjects, as will best fit them for their position in life (Chinappa 1988: 116). The primary curriculum comprised of vernacular reading, writing, arithmetic and a certain amount of mental calculation. Physical exercises were also compulsory except in Burma. Lessons on nature study (centered around the field, the crops and the cattle), the study of village map, the records of the village accountant, simple mensuration and the method of keeping and checking household or shop accounts were generally included in the curriculum, partly as an intellectual training and partly with a vocational object (Chinappa 1988: 128). Second languages were prescribed only in Madras, Punjab and Burma. In Madras schools, English which
was very largely used in that presidency was taught; in Punjab Persian was occasionally included in the course for rural schools and monastic schools in Burma taught *Pali*.

Chinappa (1988) sketches the general curriculum followed by the British government in India for primary schools at different stages.

**Lower primary Stage**

Reading: Department readers, Grammar, Recitation of poetry.

Writing: dictation and spelling.

Arithmetic: simple arithmetic- European and Native, Compound rules, easy mental arithmetic.

Geography: of the village and the district, study of map, plan of the school, houses etc.

Object lessons: on objects treated in the reading book with simple drawing, familiar animals, vegetables, minerals, and their products.

**Upper Primary Stage**

Reading: As above but more advanced.

Writing: As above but more advanced.
Arithmetic: English tables of weight, measures, etc., vulgar fractions, rule of three and compound proportion, mental arithmetic involving the use of native tables.

History: history of the province, general knowledge of India upto 1858.

Geography: Of the province and of India. Map of India.

Object lessons: plants, animals and natural phenomena with simple drawing.

**Middle Primary Stage**

Reading: departmental readers, grammar and etymology, manuscript reading, repetition of poetry, prosody.

Writing: essay or report writing in current hand with attention to handwriting, spelling and punctuation.

Mathematics: Arithmetic and native accounts, Euclid. Book I

History: history of India; some instructions in the system of Indian government.

Geography: geography of the world, elementary geography.

The first efforts at imparting modern education were made by Christian missionaries and individual officers of the company. The missionaries opened
schools, started printing presses and printed many books. The system as it evolved between 1765 and 1947 can be divided into five phases.

i. 1765-1854:

A few new types of schools giving instruction in English language and other branches of western learning started functioning. The first step towards the educational development of India was taken after the Charter Act of 1813. English was made the medium of instruction in the few schools and colleges that were opened by the government. The resources allocated to education were extremely meager.

In 1835, Thomas Macaulay set the tone for what educated Indians were going to learn about themselves, their civilization, and their view of Britain and the world around them.

Thus was born the famous-or infamous- Macaulayite education system of India. As its founder saw it, serving the people was not a priority; its primary goal was to create an educated elite that would serve the interests of the British rulers. The tragedy is that this system was not only retained after independence, but was given the pride of place to such an extent that it now dominates almost all-national life. The government services, the educational establishment, the industry, the arts and the media— all are now in the hands of a small elite that is the product of such an educational system (Muktadhara 2001: www.members.tripod.org).
ii. **1854 –1902:**

The progress in primary education was very slow during this period. Usually three causes are identified:

a. Non-introduction of compulsory primary education

b. Transfer of primary education to the control of local bodies

c. Neglect of the indigenous schools

However this period was marked by qualitative changes in certain aspects of primary education which were:

a. Construction of school buildings.

b. Admission of girls and 'untouchable' castes.

c. Use of printed books.

d. Improved curriculum.

e. Adoption of new methods of teaching.

f. Improvement in the training and qualifications of teachers.

iii. **1902-1921:**

The policy of larger grants to primary education initiated by lord Curzon brought about a considerable expansion of primary education in this period. **Gaekwar,** the ruler of the State of Baroda introduced compulsory education throughout his state in 1906. This led to the Indian nationalist opinion to press the
British government for the introduction of compulsory education. Though the bill put forward for compulsory education was rejected, there was a spur of activities by the government in this regard. The government resolution on educational policy in 1913 stated that the local governments should extend the application of the principle of free elementary education amongst the poorer and more backward sections of the society.

**1921-1937:**

The expansion of primary education was very rapid in the years 1922-27. The number of primary schools and students increased considerably. From 1927-37, there was comparatively little progress due to the financial stringing caused by the World Depression. The period witnessed neither an appreciable improvement in quality nor expansion in the field of primary education.

**iv. 1937-1947:**

During this period compulsory primary education received more attention as the Congress ministers assumed offices. An epoch making event of the period was the scheme of basic education formulated by *M.K. Gandhi* which was adopted in 1944. The core of Gandhi’s proposal was the introduction of productive handicrafts in the school curriculum. The idea was not simply to introduce handicrafts as a compulsory school subject, but to make the learning of a craft the centerpiece of the entire teaching programme. It implied a radical restructuring of the sociology of school knowledge in India, where productive handicrafts had been associated with the lower groups in the hierarchy of the
caste system. Knowledge of the production processes involved in crafts, such as spinning, weaving, leather-work, pottery, metal-work, basket-making and bookbinding had been the monopoly of specific caste groups in the lowest stratum of the traditional social hierarchy. Many of them belonged to the category of ‘untouchables’. India’s own tradition of education as well as the colonial education system had emphasized skills such as literacy and acquisition of knowledge of which the upper castes had a monopoly.

Gandhi’s proposal intended to stand the education system on its head. The social philosophy and the curriculum of what he called ‘basic education’ thus favoured the child belonging to the lowest stratum of society in such a way that it implied a programme of social transformation. It sought to alter the symbolic meaning of ‘education’ and to change the established structure of opportunities for education. (Bruke 2000: www.infed.org). Why Gandhi proposed the introduction of productive handicrafts into the school system was that he really wanted schools to be self-supporting, as far as possible. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, a poor society such as India simply could not afford to provide education for all children unless the schools could generate resources from within. Secondly, the more financially independent the schools were, the more politically independent they could be. What Gandhi wanted to avoid was dependence on the state which he felt would mean interference from the centre. Above all else, Gandhi valued self-sufficiency and autonomy. These were vital for his vision of an independent India made up of autonomous village communities to survive. It was the combination of swaraj and swadeshi related to the
education system. A state system of education within an independent India would have been a complete contradiction as far as Gandhi was concerned.

He was also of the opinion that manual work should not be seen as something inferior to mental work. He felt that the work of the craftsman or labourer should be the ideal model for the ‘good life’. Schools which were based around productive work where that work was for the benefit of all, were therefore, carrying out education of the whole person - mind, body and spirit (Richards 2001: www.vedamsbooks.com).

The right to autonomy that Gandhi’s educational plan assigns to the teacher in the context of the school’s daily curriculum is consistent with the libertarian principles that he shared with Tolstoy (Bruke 2000: www.infed.org). Gandhi wanted to free the Indian teacher from interference from outside, particularly government or state bureaucracy. Under colonial rule, the teacher had a prescribed job to do that was based on what the authorities wanted the children to learn. Textbooks were mandatory so that Gandhi found that ‘the living word of the teacher has very little value’. A teacher who teaches from textbooks does not impart originality to his pupils’. Gandhi’s plan, on the other hand, implied the end of the teacher’s subservience to the prescribed textbook and the curriculum. It presented a concept of learning that simply could not be fully implemented with the help of textbooks. Of equal, if not more importance, was the freedom it gave the teacher in matters of curriculum. It denied the state the power to decide what teachers taught and what they did in the classroom. It gave
autonomy to the teacher but it was, above all, a libertarian approach to schooling that transferred power from the state to the village (Bruke 2000: www.infed.org).

Gandhi’s basic education was, therefore, an embodiment of his perception of an ideal society consisting of small, self-reliant communities with his ideal citizen being an industrious, self-respecting and generous individual living in a small cooperative community.

IV After Independence

After Independence in 1947, the government of free India set before itself two goals in the field of primary education. They are:-

i. Introduction of free and compulsory universal education for all children up to 14 years.

ii. The conversion of all primary schools to one basic pattern.

A National Institute of Basic Education was established in 1956 and its goal was to promote within a period of 10 years free and compulsory education for children. While increase in school enrolment has been substantial, the achievements have been offset by population growth and drop-out rate in schools. The state governments allow free education at primary level. But, not all Indians get the opportunity to go to school. Schools are funded from different sources like government, local bodies and private funds. The smaller the funds the less the students receive. School institutions range from schools without any
building to schools with all the hi-tech facilities and even sites on the internet (Aharon Daniel 2001: www.adaniel.tripod.com)

Enrolment of children is easy but it is their retention in the elementary education system till they complete class VII that creates difficulty. It must be conceded that great expansion has taken place as a consequence of the efforts made to extend the outreach of elementary education to all. Alternative strategies like open schooling, non-formal education, alternative education and others have been attempted. One concern that has emerged over the years is — what are our children learning in schools in the first five or eight years? Those putting their children in high-fee charging air-conditioned schools may just not be aware of such a concern. More than 50 per cent of children drop out before completing eight years in school. Needless to say, most of these children are from the weaker sections of the society, from rural areas and urban slums. This was the group that deserved special attention not only at the policy and planning stage but also at the implementation level. (Rajput 2003: www.hinduonnet.com)

According to the National Policy on Education (1968) a system of 12 years of school education, popularly known as 10 + 2 system has been adopted. The ten year school is conceived in these segments:

**Primary** – Class I to V.

**Middle** – Class VI to VIII.

**Secondary** – Class IX and X.
As the main strategy for covering out of school children, both non-starters and drop-outs a change in the outlook has been adopted: according to which a non-formal part-time education is being developed in a large way as an alternative to formal schooling. Further, it is being suggested that the states introduce the ‘non detention’ policy so that every child shall complete one class in each year. There can be periodic assessment and continual education.

Eradication of illiteracy has been one of the major 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). Model community centers, rural libraries, youth clubs, mahila mandals and folk schools were encouraged. The Government of India established a Council for Rural Higher Education for building graduate-level manpower through the scheme of Rural Institutes. A Standing Committee of the CABE (Central Advisory Board of Education) on Social Education was constituted in 1956. A National Fundamental Education Center was started to provide high-level training facilities and undertake research studies relating to adult education. (Balsubhramanium 2000: www.col.org)

In spite of these initiatives, the program of adult literacy did not make much headway. The Community Development Program got weakened and was soon abandoned. It was assumed that adult literacy would automatically become universal as soon as the universal and compulsory elementary education became a reality. The literacy rate in India, therefore, increased only from 16.67
per cent in 1951 to 24.02 percent in 1961. But the Kothari Commission (1964-66) picked up the threads again and emphasized the importance of spreading literacy as fast as possible. It suggested the following measures:

a. Expansion of universal schooling of five-year duration for the age group 6 – 11,

b. Provision of part-time education for those children of age group 11 - 14 who had either missed schooling or had dropped out of school prematurely,

c. Provision of part-time general and vocational education to the younger adults of age group 15 – 30,

d. Use of mass media as a powerful tool of environment building for literacy,

e. Setting up of libraries,

f. Setting up follow-up programs,

g. Ensuring active role of universities and voluntary organization at the State and district levels.

The Education Commission had observed, "if literacy is to be worthwhile, it must be functional". The launching of the inter- ministerial project of Farmers' Training and Functional Literacy in 1967-68 aimed at popularization of high yielding varieties of seeds through adult education, was a step in this direction.
The program covered 144 districts where nearly 8640 classes were organized for about 2.6 lakh farmer-adults by 1977-78. But in this program, the clientele remained selective and several largely illiterate groups viz. artisans, landless labor, SCs, STs, and women got neglected.

Adult education and literacy programmes were transformed under the auspices of the National Literacy Mission (NLM) into a mass campaign leading towards a people’s movement for total literacy and a new awakening for education. The Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) provided a new sense of urgency and seriousness to adult education. The first breakthrough came in Kottayam city in Kerala, followed by Ernakulam district where a literacy campaign was initiated in 1989 and completed within a year.

The success of the campaign mode in the Ernakulum district of Kerala laid the foundation for the campaign approach. While developing a national strategy for the country, the National Literacy Mission was fully aware of the need for diversity of approaches, given the inter-regional variations in the country. It was also aware that in many parts, participation of women and disadvantaged sections would require an intensive environment building process. In this context, efforts of NLM represent a major initiative for bringing together civil society to actively participate in a people’s movement for achieving literacy within a stipulated time frame. For the first time, an area-specific time bound campaign approach had been implemented and the community had become responsible for
running its own development program and consequently determining its future (Balasubramanium 2000: www.col.org).

Recognizing the fragile nature of literacy levels achieved in a campaign mode and the need to create a learning society, the NLM provides for a Post Literacy phase where the gains of literacy are consolidated and an effort is made to link learning skills with life skills. Similarly, in order to sustain the learning process in the community, NLM supports the establishment of Continuing Education Centres that provide a package of life-linked services for neo-literates.

In the present day a lot of research and attention is given to the preparation of teaching material. At the primary level all the four skills of a language – understanding, speaking, reading and writing are sought to be developed. Despite nearly five decades of development planning in independent India, the country is still one of the nine giants in the world where there is a heavy concentration of illiteracy, and a higher incidence of poverty. From about 16% at the time of independence in 1947, the literacy rate has certainly jumped to an impressive 65.38% in 2001. But the other side of the coin is that vast sections of India’s adult population are still illiterate (Balasubramanium 2003: www.col.org).

Even after more than half a century after independence, there exist marked disparities between groups within the regions of India, which make some sections of the population highly vulnerable. In addition to the rural urban divide, the caste, class and gender disparities in health, education, poverty, access to facilities, knowledge, wealth persists, leading to a situation in which people in the
same country live in entirely different worlds in terms of health, education and other development indicators.

Poverty relates not only to economic deprivation but also to social and human development, and India’s performance in literacy, education, the role and status of women, and health care has not been notable. Regional differentials of mortality are marked, with socially advanced states such as Kerala experiencing mortality levels several fold lower than those of socially backward states (Drèze and Murthi 1999: kings.cam.ac.uk). Four large populous states of North and Central India (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) lag substantially behind the rest of the country, not only in primary education, but also in fertility reduction, the status of women and improvements in health (Balsubramanium 2003: www.col.org).

Every ten years the literate population of India goes up by about 10%. During its independence, there were only 12% literate Indians, according to the 1991 census there are 52% literate Indians, meaning that over half a billion people are literate. Education is monitored in India by state governments and this finds its expression in different figures for different states. Kerala in south India, with a population of 30 million, has the highest literacy rate in India of about 90%. Rajasthan in north India, with a population of 45 million, has the lowest literacy rate of about 40%.

Literacy rate among the urban population is higher than among the villagers. It is also higher among the men than among the women. In some states
the gap between literate men and literate women is very salient. For example, in Rajasthan and Bihar, the gap is about 30%, while in Kerala and Mizoram it is about 7%. Literacy rate among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is lower than in the general population. Among the Scheduled Tribes it is the lowest because many tribes still prefer to stay away from the mainstream population. But since independence the literacy rate among the women and the lower castes has grown up at a much higher rate than among the general population.

1.2. Definitions of literacy

Any attempts to define literacy must begin with this remarkable fact: that the practice of definition itself arises out of and is entirely dependent upon the existence of a written language. Neither the possibility of fixed and stable meaning of words, nor indeed the conception of ‘word’ itself can gain a foothold in the world of orality. Literacy individuates words from the continuous flow of speech, detaching what is said from the speaker and circumstance, and preserves a fixed linguistic meaning, which can be transferred over time and space.

Literacy is not a stagnant concept, nor does it carry an absolute definition. Today, this inherent characteristic is taken to an extreme as discrete disciplines built around media literacy, visual literacy, computer literacy, cultural literacy, information literacy, economic literacy, emancipatory literacy, and beyond. One is left asking, is anything not a literacy, and has this liberal appropriation of the term
rendered what was once largely reserved for reading and writing devoid of any real meaning.

While a cursory reflection might encourage us to seek refuge within a traditional definition (reading and writing), this would be to overlook a critical insight. In fact, while perhaps not readily apparent, the recent proliferation of definitions is indicative of literacy's intimate relationship with technology as each responds to the other in an organic dance over time. Leu (2001) expresses their interconnectedness when he states:

“Historically, the nature of literacy has always changed through different historical and cultural contexts as the technologies of information and communication have changed and as individuals have seen new possibilities within these technologies for literate acts. Thus, in a broad, historical sense, literacy has always been deictic, its meaning dependent upon the technologies and envisionments within many historical, religious, political, and cultural contexts.” (Lievrouw and Lynch 2001: is.gseis.uda.edu)

It is a well-established fact that no society can build its morrow on a generation that is ignorant nor can it thrive on the ignorance of a certain section of its people. Literacy and society are two interdependent variables. All societies, all nations realize the importance of literacy and have come to terms with the need to take education as a social imperative and an economic prerogative. Accepting that literacy is intricately linked to society, one notices that the broad
range of definitions provided by various academicians, organizations and literacy researchers, are particular to society and time.

Literacy is not necessarily beneficial in and of itself; many oral cultures function quite well with no writing system. For instance in the U.S., some Native American cultures prefer that their languages not be written. The Cherokee do not believe that all their people should be able to read and write. The Amish do not believe there is a need for education beyond the 8th grade. On the other hand, in many parts of the world, literacy is seen as essential for improving one's social and economic situation. In the United States, literacy is viewed as an economic necessity: It "plays a major academic and social role in the formal school systems of North America. Thus, learning to read and write is perceived to be a major task for the student and a notable feature of acculturation into mainstream culture" (Roberts 1994: www.ncela.gwu.edu). Seen in this political light, the consequences of literacy instruction become clearer. As the disfranchised acquire literacy tools, they become more able to express their needs and claim their rights.

Traditionally, literacy was construed as the technical skill of transforming speech in its written form and had been defined as the ability to write whatever one can say, and to read with understanding anything one would have understood had it been spoken. Within the general population the prevailing concept of literacy is ‘the ability to read, write and do math’. Definitions of literacy
found in the various dictionaries, like the Oxford dictionary, Merriam Webster Collegiate dictionary and the Collins dictionary, are more or less the same that literacy is the state of being literate and 'literate' according to the same source is the 'ability to read and write'.

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 defines literacy as "an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society." This is a broader view of literacy than just an individual's ability to read, the more traditional concept of literacy. As information and technology have increasingly shaped our society, the skills we need to function successfully have gone beyond reading, and literacy has come to include the skills listed in the current definition (National Institute for Literacy, America: www.novel.nifl.gov).

Paradoxically, although a fundamental capacity of literacy is to render verbal analysis increasingly precise it has been observed that vagueness characterizes almost all attempts to explicate the meaning of literacy. Definitions have ranged from the 17th century Swedish definition of literacy as the ability to sign ones name and to read aloud from familiar texts, often wholly or partially memorized to the definition in contemporary school contexts as the ability to produce extended description and argumentation in writing; and to decode and make complex inferences about unfamiliar texts whose interpretation may require extensive background knowledge. (Mishra 2000: 56)
Attempts to articulate a conception of ‘functional’ literacy which, might be more inclusive, practical and more relevant to the demands of everyday life have foundered on the vagueness of the idea of ‘function’. The UN (1948) describes literacy as the ability to read and write a simple message in any language. UNESCO (1951) defined literacy in similar terms stating that a person who is literate can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life. However, literacy is a multifarious concept, which cannot be captured by these simple definitions.

In a very general sense this basic connotation of reading and writing remains, but in the contemporary context the additional connotations of the term derive from the changing demands made on literacy both in the industrialized and the developing world. In the industrialized countries more and more literate individuals are finding their literacy insufficient for the demands made on it both in the place of work and in civic life. Literacy derives its added connotation in the context of widespread literacy, which continues to deprive a large number of people of the advantages that accrue through formal education.

Dubin and Kuhlman (1992) state that the field of literacy has been marked by significant new direction in literacy research bought about by questions which seeks to discover how literacy functions in families, in communities and in workplaces. What does it mean to be literate as a member of a particular culture? What are the patterns of literacy use within fields of work, within professions,
within age groups? In defining literacy as a mere ability to read and write is highly disastrous (Valenzuela 2002: www.unm.edu).

John Wilson (1986) argues that people often speak of literacy as if it were a ‘skill’ like being able to ride a bicycle or swim. Computers can, in some sense, be programmed to read and write, but how thin this sense is – how much is missing from what we hope human beings do in their reading and writing- is clear enough. He furthers elaborates this point by saying that the human beings, unlike machines, do not form strokes and letters or enunciate the syllables represented by ‘the cat sat on the mat’. Human beings express their thoughts and feelings in writing and understand those of others in reading. To quote Wilson again “Literacy so far from being a single skill or even a set of skills, is inextricably bound up with understanding, with choices of words, with grasp of syntax, grammar and diction and what is all often omitted – with a certain attitude towards the whole business. (Suzanne, Allan and Kieran 1986: 120 )

According to the Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador (NIFL) “literacy not only involves competency in reading and writing, but goes beyond this to include the critical and effective use of these in people’s lives and the use of language (oral and written) for all purposes”. This definition involves critical thinking about what one reads as well as expanding he term to encompass oral forms of literacy. With the increasing demands of information and technology in shaping our society the definition of literacy takes on a more contextualized perspective. According to the national institute of literacy (USA)
literacy is “an individual’s ability to read, write; speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society. (NIFL: www.novel.nifl.gov)

This is a broader view of literacy than just an individual’s ability to read, the more traditional concept of literacy. As information and technology have increasingly shaped our society, the skills we need to function successfully have gone beyond reading and literacy has come to include the skill listed in the current definition. Of note, is the emphasis on English. The stress on English may be relevant to some countries but we cannot give a general definition of a literate as a person who can speak English.

Freire’s book with Macedo (1987) calls for a view of literacy as cultural politics. That is, literacy training should not only provide reading, writing, and numeracy, but it should be considered”...a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people.” Literacy (for Freire and Macedo) is analyzed according to whether it serves to reproduce existing social formations or serves as a set of cultural practices that promote democratic and emancipatory change.” (Freire and Macedo, 1987:viii.) Literacy as cultural politics is also related in Freire’s work to emancipatory theory and critical theory of society. Hence, emancipatory literacy “becomes a vehicle by which the oppressed are equipped with the necessary tools to reappropriate their history, culture, and language practices” (Freire and Macedo: 159).
He not only taught the peasants to read, he taught them to understand the reasons for their oppressed condition. The sounds, letters, and words from the world of his adult learners were integrated and codified. Ideas, words, and feelings joined together to generate a powerful literacy that was based on the learners' lived experiences. The Brazilian peasants learned to read the words rapidly because they had already read the world, and their world was the foundation for reading the words. Traditionally, literacy has been the process of reading only the word. Emancipatory literacy is reading the world. Freire was not jailed and exiled because he taught peasants to "read the word," but because he taught the subordinate class to critically read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Freire taught the peasants to use their knowledge and their literacy to examine and reexamine the surrounding power structures of the dominant society.

Freire taught that no education is politically neutral. Traditionally, teachers have assumed that they don't have to bother with politics and that their only concern is with teaching. It is pretty naive, and maybe even elitist, to think that teaching and learning could possibly take place in a vacuum. Every time a curriculum is chosen, a political decision is being made. Behind the apparently simple question what should be taught, and what shouldn't be there are great social, cultural, and political implications. (Joan Wink 2003 www.joanwink.com)

Schools are social; they are filled with real people who live in real communities and have real concerns. People with multiple perspectives send their kids to schools. Teaching and learning are a part of real life, and real life
includes politics and people. Schools do not exist on some elevated pure plain of pedagogy away from the political perspectives of people. If two friends sit down for a social visit, politics is a part of it. Paulo Freire recognized this before many others in education. If educators state that they are neutral, then they are on the side of the dominant culture.

It is necessary to clarify what teaching is and what learning is. Teaching is the form or the act of knowing, which the professor or educator exercises; it takes as its witness the student. This act of knowing is given to the student as a testimony, so that the student will not merely act as a learner. In other words, teaching is the form that the teacher or educator possesses to bear witness to the student on what knowing is, so that the student will also know instead of simply learn. For that reason, the process of learning implies the learning of the object that ought to be learned. This preoccupation has nothing to do exclusively with the teaching of literacy skills. This preoccupation establishes the act of teaching and the act of learning as fundamental moments in the general process of knowledge, a process of which the educator on the one hand and the learner on the other are a part. And this process implies a subjective stance. It is impossible that a person, not being the subject of his own curiosity, can truly grasp the object of his knowledge.

Hiebert (1991) takes an explicitly constructive perspective to the definition of literacy: “the new perspective on literacy does not consist of old ideas in a new name, but rather it represents a profound shift from a text driven view of literacy
as active transformation of texts.” (Valenzuela 2002: www.unm.edu). In the old view meaning was presumed to reside primarily within the text, whereas according to the new view meaning is created with the interaction between the reader and the text. Langer (1991) takes this notion a step forward contrasting literacy as the act of reading and writing and literacy as the way of thinking (Valenzuela 2002: www.unm.edu).

A glance at the literature about literacy produced by linguists, literacy specialists, and social historians reveals three emerging directions in literacy research:

- Literacy as a verbal skill involving the ability to control the visual medium of language.
- Literacy as a call for the participation of the socially deprived illiterate masses in the heritage of written culture.
- Literacy as an enabling factor, which creates conditions conducive to linguistic innovation and imaginary creativity. (Srivatsava 1993: 46-47)

Viewed from the point of linguistic resources, literacy may be regarded as an extension of the functional potential of language with regard to the visual mode of transmission involving writing and reading skills. The study of literacy is broad and has focused on different aspects. Individual aspects of literacy have been investigated from psychological and educational perspectives. The main concern of this group is the cognitive effects of literacy on individuals. Social aspects of literacy have been studied by sociologists and social anthropologists.
This group has been concerned with how literacy affects society or how societies use literacy in certain contexts. Research on linguistics aspects of literacy concerns the relationships between spoken and written language, and more recently the properties of writing systems.

Each argument in these areas mainly reflects either of two particular perspectives – evolutionist view or the contextualist view. The evolutionists see the individuals and societies following a course of linear progression. The contextualists see each culture and society varying and literacy practices situated in contexts differing across cultures.

The general argument of the evolutionists is: Culture develops from simple to complex, society evolves from primitive to civilized, and humans progress from illiterate to literate.

The contextualist view, which emerged in the 1980s, and 90s appeared from the areas of psychology, history, social anthropology, linguistics and sociolinguistics. According to his approach literacy is seen as social practices embedded in the contexts where the speakers of the language live and make use of literacy for their purposes and where the use of literacy is somehow regulated by the social relationships of people. The concern of this group is more or how people use literacy than on how literacy affects people. According to Heath (1992) the meanings of literacy in certain societies vary depending upon on how the society or the group of people see or view literacy (Tauchi 2000:
www.ntu.edu.au). The definition of literacy, then, can differ from one community to another, from one period of time to another and from one literacy program to another.

Street (1993) distinguishes these two streams of study, naming the first ‘autonomous model’ and the second the ‘ideological model’. In the autonomous model literacy is seen independent of social context, and its consequences for society and cognition can be derived from its intrinsic characteristic. Advocates of the autonomous model of literacy assume a single direction in which literacy development can be traced and associate it with ‘progress’, civilization, individual liberty and social mobility. According to the autonomous model literacy has inherent qualities in itself which brings about a change in the society, making one literate individual as modern, cosmopolitan and innovative. Literacy, then, represents a way of perpetuating the notion of a great divide between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ societies.

Many researchers were dissatisfied with autonomous model of literacy, as it failed to provide a more theoretically sound and ethnographic understanding of the actual significance of literacy practices in people’s lives. They view literacy as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures and society. They look into the role of literacy practices in reproducing or challenging structures of power and domination. Street uses the term ‘ideological’ to describe this approach. According to him all approaches to literacy in practice will involve a bias, will be
loaded with some ideology. Literacy is not a ‘neutral technology’ as prescribed in the reductionist ‘autonomous’ model as can be seen by various instances through ethnographies of literacy.

For instance, Lewis (2000) in writing about the meanings and uses of literacy in Somalia rejects the idea of ‘great divide’ between literacy and orality intrinsic to the autonomous model of literacy. He further demonstrates the role of mixed literate in local politics and in the assertion of their identity. Similarly, Rockhill’s account of the politics of literacy reveals the struggles for power and position by women among the Hispanics in Los Angeles (www.edst.educ.ubc.ca). Similarly in the recent past a group of women from the Dubagunta village in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh started a mass movement against liquor forcing the government to put against the sale of liquor. However keeping in mind the falling revenue of the state the ban was lifted and the lesson, which had instigated the movement, was subsequently scraped off the books. Looking at these instances one is not only promptly ready to believe that literacy is ideologically manipulated but also that literacy is power. According to Rockhill literacy has been on symbolic and ideological dimensions and goes far beyond being able to read and write. The power of literacy is framed primarily in terms of economic development, equality of opportunity and the possibility of liberty and democracy. The ideology in the ideological model refers to ‘the site of tension between authority and the power on the one hand and resistance and creativity on the other’. Street holds that there is a tension between social groups one of, which has the authority and power over the other, and one of, which is resistant
to the other. Literacy and language, along with various cultural practices play a role in mediating this tension.

Definitions of literacy employed in literacy programs have been changing reflecting the change in the stream of literacy studies. In the periods between the 1960s and 1980s UNESCO’s definition of literacy expanded from the narrowest sense, skill of reading and writing, to one including economic and social function. The perception of literacy by various organizations has also changed – they have come to see literacy in bigger and wider contexts. Some see literacy as an integral part of development and others see it as a tool of total human growth that enables individuals and groups to ‘read the world’ around them and transform it.

According to the National Literacy Mission, India (1988), merely signing one’s name does not make a person literate. They have precisely defined what comprises as literacy for them. The reading, writing and numeracy skills expected from the learner are as follows:

1) Reading:
   - Reading aloud, with normal accent a simple passage on a topic of interest to the learners, at a speed of 30 words per minute.
   - Reading silently small paragraphs in simple language at a speed of 35 words per minute.
   - Reading with understanding road signs, posters, simple instructions and newspapers for neo literates etc.
• Ability to follow simple written messages relating to ones working and living environment.

2) Writing:
• Copying with understanding, at a speed of 7 words per minute.
• Taking dictation at a speed of 5 words per minute.
• Writing with proper spacing and alignment.
• Writing independently short letters and applications of most use to the learners

3) Numeracy:
• To read and write numerals from 1 to 100.
• Doing simple calculations without fractions, involving addition, subtraction up to 3 digits and multiplication and division by 2 digits.
• Working knowledge of metric units of weights measures currency, distance, area and units of time.
• Broad idea of proportion and interest (without involving fractions) and their use in working and living.

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 says:
“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical education and professional education shall be made generally available.”
A quantitative definition of literacy which is used by various governmental organizations and literacy programmes is proposed. According to this, a person is considered to be literate when s/he can read at a certain grade level (e.g. 6th grade). This grade level literacy can theoretically be measured by standardized tests. A limitation of this definition is that it does not account for a person’s ability to function in different and social and human contexts.

In opposition to this some researchers came up with the qualitative definitions of literacy. They mentioned two types of literacy:

**Functional literacy:** - According to this definition, a person is considered literate when s/he has the ability to function within a predetermined context. This context is not selected by the learner, instead, socioeconomic, race, gender, or other factors may dictate the context of instruction. Sharon in the paper 'Defining Literacy' says that the term ‘functional literacy was first used by the US Army during World War II to indicate the capability to understand written instructions necessary for conducting basic military functions and tasks ….. a fifth grade reading level’ (Castell, Duke and Egan: 1986: 148). Functional literacy today is the ability to accomplish reading and written tasks required for functioning at a minimal level in society. The context may have been determined - that learners need to complete specific tasks, write resumes, fill out applications, or operate a certain piece of equipment. In the US this would include reading road signs, reading food labels, taking a driver's licensee exam, filling out job instructions,
and reading instructions on the job. The problem with this definition is that it transforms the learner into an object.

**Liberatory or Humanistic literacy**: - Building on the work of Paulo Freire, this definition names a person as literate when s/he has become politicized. A politicized person is able to manipulate language (speaking, reading, writing etc) so as to comprehend his/her own self-identity in the context in which s/he functions. The literate person does not learn to function in a predetermined context, but rather how to use language to function in different contexts. The learner, together with the educator, decides the context of literate functioning or at least has valued input regarding what is taught and what is learnt. This approach allows a learner to determine what they feel a comfortable level of literacy is and whether they have achieved it or not.

It seems that in the past 10-20 years, the understanding of literacy has simultaneously been changed, broadened, narrowed, manipulated, co-opted, politicized, liberated, confined, clarified, and muddled. Its also clear that a single definition of literacy does not always work, therefore giving rise to expansive words like "literacies" or clarifying adjectives such as "functional," "workplace" or "critical." How do these definitions of literacy affect learners especially women and our work as literacy advocates or teachers or researchers? (Mevmiller 2000: www.eduation.gsu.edu).

To emancipate illiterate girls and women, literacy has to go well beyond reading and writing skills and incorporate emancipatory content and process.
Literacy per se does not foster the development of critical thinking and limits the scope of experience and opportunities that awaits them. Literacy materials for girls and women should (Gloria 2002: www.accu.or.jp):

- Reflect the many different life experiences of women and girls.
- Show girls and women’s strengths, sense of dignity, and values
- Show them in a variety of jobs and roles including those that may seem surprising or different for them
- Support their desire to learn and to educate themselves according to their own hopes and dreams
- Recognize that there are many levels of oppression for girls and women and that society often treats them differently because of such things as race, class, religion, education and sexual orientation
- Recognize that they share common experiences and present a positive image of girls and women
- Be easy to read with words, layout, print, illustrations, format and binding that make them as easy as possible for all girls and women to use
- Be written mostly by women
- Keep in mind that girls and women with limited reading skills have the following characteristics:
  - They are busy with household chores.
  - They are socially and economically disadvantaged.
  - They have experienced failures in school during childhood or do not have confidence that they can learn well.
- They have strong feeling of inferiority and shame about being illiterate.
- They will only read what they think is useful or entertaining for them.
- They have their own ideas about things. They like to be treated as adults and as equals. They dislike being tested.
- They like the feeling of achievement.
- They learn best if they can participate in the learning activities.

A literacy campaign which aims to involve the women has to keep the factors mentioned above in mind. Contents of the literacy materials for girls and women should be related to their everyday life, interest and problem. In some way, these can help solve their immediate problems and raise relevant questions about their own conditions and status in society. If contents of literacy materials are familiar to the girls and women, they would be able to relate what they read to their life, be stimulated to act, discuss and share opinions among themselves. For instance, the Female Functional Literacy (FFL) project which is continuing in provinces of Philippines. The utilization of area-based, community, and culture-specific literacy materials is an innovative feature of FFL (Gloria 2002: www.or.jp). Their contents address community needs identified through a thorough situational analysis. The identified needs revolve around health, nutrition, food production and related development concerns. These contents are translated into specific doable messages and are linked with literacy and
numeracy skills. The basic literacy skills are expected to enhance learner’s ability to take action on health and nutrition and other messages essential to survival, protection, and development.

A unique feature of FFL as mentioned by Sarrienter Gloria is their curriculum. Literacy materials they use are collaborated from various agencies working for the needs of these people. The content is validated by specialists in those fields. The FFL model to literacy materials development demonstrates that it is possible to take people with no previous training in materials development and have them turn out good materials. Each province that has been participating in the FFL project developed its own primer and facilitator’s guide to ensure that the materials are truly need-based and resource-based. This is in recognition also of the essential meaning of literacy as a social process - that “the process of becoming literate is experienced by individuals in their own local and personal terms within the special context of their social reality and the practice of literacy.”

Wanting to promote literacy of girls and women is a complicated yet rewarding task. One needs to have a clear understanding and appreciation of the tremendous load of responsibilities girls and women carry with them from childhood. One also needs to put their double responsibility in their social, cultural, and political realities. The strength and limitations of their limited reading
skills need to be addressed also in terms of text presentation and layout design. The most important aspect, which is a sine-qua-non of developing materials for girls and women with limited reading skills, is commitment to their empowerment and status in society. How to combine these elements in a balanced manner remains a challenge that must be met to bring about meaningful changes in the life of illiterate girls and women.

1.3. REDEFINING LITERACY

Before embarking on redefining literacy one major point has to be driven home. Literacy is in no way an antonym of illiteracy has many campaigns might lead us to believe. There is a well-circulated notion that says that illiterates have to be taught to learn… as if illiteracy were a kind of plague, which has to be eradicated.

Before the 60s, it was claimed that life prior to becoming literate was devoid of culture. According to this conception, the illiterate individual was thought of as being excluded from the social structure and literacy as the strategy designed to rescue and integrate him into society. Research findings during eighties and nineties, however (Fingeret, 1984; Gowen, 1994; Kalman, 1999), reveal that illiterate individuals and poorly educated adults do not have a diminished self image (www.unesco.org). Public stereotypes of illiterate individuals portraying them as dependent, incompetent, incapable, weak and failure – prone, come up against the fact that adult illiterates" have had reading
and writing experiences, and have a concept of its use, and functionality (Kalman, 1999: www.unesco.cl).

Currently, qualitative research on the subject has provided ample evidence that indicates that there are few people in the world who have not had any contact whatsoever with reading and writing. The notion that literacy programmes are intended for individuals who are total ignoramuses who cannot write or do not know the uses of writing, does not reflect today’s social reality (Street, 1993). UNESCO's World Conference at Persepolis (1975), marks a turning point for adult education, to the extent that the concept of what constitutes an illiterate gradually begins to change. No longer would they be considered empty vessels demanded to be filled, but persons endowed with reasoning abilities, profound labour experiences, and a strong sense of individual and collective responsibility (Kalman, 1989). Research studies (Scribner and Cole, 1983) have corroborated, that adult illiterates are persons worthy of respect, individual, intelligent and capable of engaging in abstract thinking. A literacy programme is far better off if it assumes that the knowledge is there: that educators accept that they are working with competent adults who operate in complex social settings and require a wide range of intellectual and social skills. Despite this modern view, in the modern society illiterates are discriminated upon, not only because they lack the ability to write, but also, as the result of the prejudices with which society has branded those who can not read or write.
Once we have decided upon, what illiteracy is the next step is to define literacy, which is a multifarious concept. The census figures of literacy rates and education growth in India show a remarkable progress. The literacy level of India 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 %. One could on a superficial glance at applaud the flattering figures shown by the census. But how was a literate defined. According to the Indian government 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 (www.humanrightsinitiative.org). Such statistics then is not really trustworthy for it leaves out the different natures of literacy. If the percentage of literate women has increased from 18.69% to 54.16%, does it mean that the number of women who are conscious of their rights, who can raise their voices against violence at work and domestic sphere has increased? Literacy is not just a process of learning skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man and his full development.

Over the past two decades, theoretical approaches to literacy have argued that literacy practices cannot be understood as a set of neutral technical skills, but must be seen as embedded within particular social, economic, political and ideological contexts (Heath 1983; Street 1984, 1993). Furthermore, according to these authors, understandings of literacy as a neutral and inherently empowering
skill, or the *autonomous* model of literacy (Street 1984), fail to recognise the ways in which western assumptions about what literacy "is" and "is for" are imposed on local populations—to the detriment of literacy projects around the world. Despite the strength of the argument, this *ideological* model of literacy (ibid.) has not trickled down to most educational efforts on the ground. In general, such projects continue to view literacy as an unquestionable marker of cognitive, social and economic development. Literacy programs are often implemented without a clear understanding of what communities want, need and expect from literacy skills, and also what literacy skills they already have. Street (2001) suggests that this lack of explicit attention to theory ...has led to so many failures in development literacy programmes; behind the naturalisation of teaching and learning have lurked ideological pressures and political dogmas, often colonial but also urban/rural, or based on local ethnic conflicts and hierarchies. (Street 2001: 10)

Alternatively literacy is defined as a tool to gain ‘empowerment’ and to become ‘liberated’. Literacy does not empower people. After literacy campaign ‘concludes’ its ‘work’ there are very few signs of having changed peoples lives. It seems that many of the past claims about the benefits of literacy are bogus. Literacy in itself probably does not empower and does not bring benefits in respect of health, productivity or population growth. However, this is not to say that literacy can never bring huge benefits. A campaign’s approach should involve two parallel and interweaving processes: a literacy process and an
empowering process. The literacy gives people practical skills which will help in the empowerment process (e.g. as they assume positions of responsibility in community organizations) and the empowerment process in turn creates uses for literacy in people's everyday lives. This mutual consolidation and reinforcement is the essence of why it makes sense to fuse the two processes. Literacy programmes, then, can be very empowering if the literacy process is interwoven with other processes through a well-structured participatory methodology.

Literacy programmes in the past (especially since Freire) have tried to fuse the two processes and some have succeeded, with remarkable results. However, most have failed because they have fallen into believing that either literacy in itself is sufficient (so they have ignored other processes and focused on the product) or they have assumed that empowerment in itself is enough (but have in practice tried to "indoctrinate" people into new ideologies) (www.dfid.gov.uk).

The list on literacy terms comprises UNESCO's definition: "A literate is a person who, with understanding, can both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life." The backgrounder to the invitation for this forum mentions that this popular view of literacy is insufficient in the context of the different ethnic and linguistic cultures of Asia. This argument has to be taken still further and the ideas of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's should be put to use. For him and many others who have embraced his work, literacy is a part of the process by which illiterate people become aware of their personal situation-
and learn to do something about improving it. This definition is worth being adhered to.

The logical question that arises then is what is meant by the word empowerment. What does one as a feminist (which by the way means that a feminist strives for equal opportunities for men and women) understand by an empowered man or woman? Is it someone who can read and maybe write a simple statement on her everyday life, value free, or empowerment a process? A process of becoming aware of a situation in which you find yourself and want to come to grips with. To get to know the forces of patriarchy that makes you somebody that you are not? The obvious choice seems to be to choose the process approach for empowerment.

Empowerment, as a process, links up with Paulo Freire's definition of literacy. Literacy feeds into empowerment but is not conditional. The most important part of the process is that one gets a grip on life. Decisions can be made and adhered to by the person. One learns to do something about their own situation. One realizes that there are possibilities of change and that you recognize the forces that prevent change or gendered development.

As far as literacy is concerned, women are particularly underprivileged. During the course of this Second Asia Regional Literacy Forum, New Delhi, gender aggregated data show the discrepancy of literacy percentages between men and women, between boys and girls (www.literacyonline.com). Linking it with empowerment clearly girls are not considered equal to boys and do not get
the same education. The reasons for this situation are complex—physical, economical, political, historical and socio cultural. These six dimensions of empowerment are interrelated. All these do not all carry equal weight. The socio-cultural context is all pervasive, all permeating and decisive. With some examples one can see that the socio cultural context slows down the process of literacy by keeping women disempowered.

Physical empowerment is being master of your own body. It should in principle be your own decision whether to have a child, to practice family planning or to have an abortion. In this region, however, sex is often not discussed between partners or the willingness or the physical ability of the woman to bear another child not questioned. Refusal to be intimate when you expect the man to have visited someone else before he comes to you is culturally almost impossible. Women often cannot demand sterilization or anti conception pills without the husband (and family) doubting the fidelity of the women. A Bombay based research proved that 99% of abortions took place of female fetuses and had nothing to do with the physical condition of the pregnant woman. Often women do not know how their womb functions. They suffer from Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDS) without realization that this is not a normal healthy condition. Organizations can produce all the pamphlets in the world to explain the causes and consequences of being HIV positive but if one is unable to say NO when it matters, the booklet is 'barren.'
The same argument can explain the minimal participation of women in politics. Socio-cultural impediments make a reservation policy necessary otherwise women do not get a say in local politics or do not get a ticket from a political party. A recent UNICEF sponsored research indicated that violence against women in local governing bodies is increasing. Women approve documents by affixing their new learned signature or by inking their thumb and impress documents they do not understand. They are not empowered enough to say: "I need training" or "explain it to me for I do not understand."

A woman usually sits at the back of the meeting and does not dare speak in front of men because it is socially not accepted. Women do not want a grand scale irrigation project that alienates their labour and takes them far from home and children. Women are unable to participate in the direction of development, disempowered to decide what is good and healthy for them and the family.

Literacy, the ability to read a document or a letter, the ability to write, to consciously sign for agreement connects with the ability to voice demands, to speak out in front of men, to effect balanced development for both men and women. For men it is essential to let women speak and to listen to women's needs for they may be different then theirs. Changing the status of women depends on changing the attitude of men, particularly in their role as fathers and husbands and in their relationships with women as equal partners. UNESCO would like to be an intermediary to provide a different concept of masculinity. It seeks to develop and disseminate curriculum resources and textbooks depicting
non-violent and non-aggressive behaviour and provide training for boys, girls and educators in emotional expressions and inter-group communication. UNESCO looks forward to promote change in the representation of men in mass media to counter any impact of violent images of masculinity of movies and television. This was decided in an expert group meeting in Oslo in September 1997 as part of UNESCO's Culture of Peace programme (www.literacyonline.org).

Riet Turksmathe, a gender expert in UNESCO reveals the importance of addressing the sociocultural context of literacy and empowerment by giving the instance of a program called Education for Women's Empowerment (Mahila Samakhya). A program carried over from India by colleagues to Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda and possibly Pakistan and Palestine. It is a programme stimulating the empowerment of women so as to take control of their own lives. With this aim, the project provides the crucial conceptual and practical link between empowerment and education. The premise is that empowerment is essential for women to be active participants in the educational process. Mahila Samakhya was born from the need to translate the vision of the National Educational Policy, which states that education can be used as an agent of change. Operationalising this commitment, literacy is perceived as one component of an overall strategy of empowerment. The project attempts to create a demand for literacy (Department of Education, GOI, Education for All, the Indian Scene, subtitled Widening Horizons p.35-38). However the pace at which this is accomplished is determined by the women themselves (www.literacyonline.org).
One of the most interesting aspects of the project is the articulation of 10 nonnegotiable principles. To mention a few: women have to consolidate their independent time and therefore the pace of the program cannot be hurried. You cannot take short cuts. Project functionaries are facilitators and do not act on any one’s directive. In this way activists within government service or from outside can be appointed as coordinators. These women are used to work with women groups on an equal basis. Education should be understood as a process, which enables women to question, conceptualize and seek answers. They act and reflect on their actions and raise new questions, exactly as Paulo Freire defined literacy: "illiterate people becoming aware of their situation and learn to do something about it." In Mahila Samakhya there is an acceptance that as an environment of learning is created, what women decide to learn first, may not be reading or writing. Women’s priorities for learning must be respected.

The result of this project is that a change in gender relations is taking place. Women have proved to be effective in local political bodies and have sent their daughters to school. Families are embracing smaller family norms, women work and decide how to spend the money, and they want their husbands to stop drinking and object to household violence. For themselves they want to learn to read and write when they are not too tired in the night. They want to understand their situation and bring change in their status in society. If it is in that order: once a process of empowerment is set in motion, literacy in its broadest definition will follow.
Illiterate women remain the poorest of the poor even when they play an essential role in their economical development of their families and the communities. These women are the least paid and most exploited (Alshi 2001: www.literacyonline.com). However a question worth posing is whether an educated woman really becomes ‘liberated’ is a question worth posing. Islam K.M.Bahrul, in his paper Development Challenges for 21st Century Indian Society: Issues in Women Literacy & Women Rights Education in Assam presented at the Second Asia Regional Literacy Forum-Innovation and Professionalization in Adult Literacy, New Delhi 1998 gives data he collected to find how conscious a woman is about her rights. A few pertinent questions were asked to a sample consisting of 200 women belonging to various groups like Educated, Illiterate, Employed, Urban, Rural etc. (as cited by Bahrul www.literacyonline.com)

The collected data made clear that there exists an urgent need of increasing the awareness level of the Indian women about their legal, constitutional & marital rights. We can see that as much as 45% of the educated women are not aware of their rights and 94% of the illiterate women have no idea about women rights. A corroborative response is also seen when only a small percentage of women has indicated to go for legal/judicial redressal against any infringement of such rights. At the same time it is also well founded that most of these women (77%) are aware that the do not know enough about their rights.
Yet another aspect of literacy is that the speakers of the language, those who use literacy are the ones who define it. In many arguments it sounds as if the speakers or the ones receiving literacy are passive recipients of beneficial skills, which are introduced by someone from outside. It may be true that a particular form of literacy has been introduced in that way to a society which does not ‘read or write’ before. But when we discuss literacy practices in different cultures, it is more important to know how people in each culture view literacy and modify it for their own purpose.

1.4. Literacy Scenario In India¹

The Census 2001 provisional reports indicate that India has made significant progress in the field of literacy during the decade since the previous census in 1991. The literacy rate in 2001 has been recorded at 65.38% as against 52.21% in 1991. (www.nlm.nic.in: 2002) The Census 2001 provisional figures also indicate that the efforts of the nation during the past decade to remove the scourge of illiteracy have not gone in vain. The eradication of illiteracy from a vast country like India beset by several social and economic hurdles is not an easy task. Realising this the National Literacy Mission was set up on 5th May, 1988 to impart a new sense of urgency and seriousness to adult education. After the success of the areas specific, time bound, voluntary based campaign approach first in Kottayam city and then in Ernakulum district in Kerala in 1990, the National

¹ We have added this section now, since the external examiner has suggested to incorporate Indian experience in literacy programmes in those states of which the primers are under discussion.
Literacy Mission had accepted the literacy campaigns as the dominant strategy for eradication of illiteracy.

Of all the spheres of Indian society where there is an enormous gap between the stated goals and actual achievements, literacy stands out as one of the most depressing, probably next only to unemployment and poverty. In 1991 (the year of latest census), only half the population in India is literate; and going by the present trend, the total literacy in India is approximately half a century away. Besides such low level and slow progress, the literacy scenario in India is also characterised by wide inequities among different sections of the population. Another important weakness of the literacy scenario is that, the widespread illiteracy is found not only among the aged, but also among younger boys and girls because of low enrolment and high dropout rates (www.literacyonline.org). Finally, one should also note that literacy is defined very liberally in the population census. According to Amartya Sen if we try to measure literacy in terms of years of schooling, the average is merely 2.4 years in India for persons aged 25 and above (Dreze and Sen, 1995). The current literacy status in India as well as its rate of progress since the fifties would clearly indicate that the issue has generally been neglected here.

Among its south-Asian neighbours, although the literacy rate in India is better than in Nepal (27 percent). Pakistan (36 percent) and Bangladesh (37 percent), it is much worse than in Sri Lanka (89 percent). Compared to east and south-east Asian countries, the situation is again much worse in India, not only with respect
to their current literacy rates, but even with respect to the past literacy rates of those countries when they were at a comparable state of economic development. The neglect of literacy as an essential component of development is also indicated by the inadequate allocation of resources for this sector (Shaibal Gupta and Ashwani Sharma as cited in www.literacyonline.org) Although educational expenditure as a proportion of gross national product has increased from a little over 1 percent in early fifties to around 3 percent in early nineties, this is much below the target of 6 percent, recommended in 1966 by the Education Commission (GOI, 1966). Indeed, even this target of 6 percent is much lower than the international average for the developing countries which stood at around 15 percent during the eighties (Basu, 1995).

The National Literacy Mission was revitalised with the approval of the Union Government on 30th September, 1999. The Mission's goal is to attain total literacy i.e. a sustainable threshold literacy rate of 75% by 2007. The Mission seeks to achieve this by imparting functional literacy to non-literates in the 15-35 age-group. To tackle the problem of residual illiteracy, now it has been decided to adopt an integrated approach to Total literacy campaigns and Post literacy programme. This means the basic literacy campaigns and post literacy programmes will be implemented under one literacy project called 'Literacy Campaigns and Operation Restoration' to achieve continuity, efficiency and convergence and to minimise unnecessary time lag between the two. Post literacy Campaigns are treated only as a preparatory phase for launching Continuing Education with the ultimate aim of creating a learning society
The scheme of Jan Shikshan Sansthan or Institute of People's Education, previously known as the Scheme of Shramik Vidyapeeth was initially evolved as a non-formal continuing education programme to respond to the educational and vocational training needs of adults and young people living in urban and industrial areas and for persons who had migrated from rural to urban settings. Now the Institutes' activities have been enlarged and infrastructure strengthened to enable them to function as district level repositories of vocational and technical skills in both urban and rural areas. At present there are 122 Jan Shikshan Sansthas in India. (www.pd.cpim.org)

Ever since its inception the National Literacy Mission has taken measures to strengthen its partnership with NGOs and to evolve both institutional and informal mechanisms to give voluntary organisations active promotional role in the literacy movement. Now under the scheme of support to NGOs they are encouraged and provided with financial assistance to run post literacy and continuing education programmes in well defined areas.

1.4.1 Current Literacy State in Madhya Pradesh

The state literacy presently is 64.11 %, which is close to the national literacy rate 65.35 %. A summary of the literacy profile of the state of Madhya Pradesh (MP) is given in the table below.
In its effort to provide education the state government runs 51164 primary schools, 13369 middle schools, 1600 high schools and 1782 higher secondary schools. Over all 75 per cent of school education in MP is provided by the state, though as one moves upwards in the educational hierarchy the commitment of the state becomes progressively reduced.

In its schools government employs 3,35,342 regular teachers, of whom about half are at the primary level. The state, therefore, has at its command a huge array of almost 70000 schools and about 3.35 lakh teachers. This is the largest single set of government servants in the state. The figures provide a very rosy picture but the reality is rather conflicting. The general complaint is that the state schools do not function well, the teachers do not attend to their duties diligently and many village schools are without teachers because they do not like to serve in rural areas. In other words, the huge educational infrastructure at school level available to the state is deemed to be either non functional or extremely inefficient in functioning.
Therefore, in order to ensure rapid literacy the state government launched two more schemes. The first relates to appointment of Shikshakarmis or literacy workers on fixed pay, who are supposed to supplement the teaching staff. At present there are 46294 Shikshakarmis in the rural areas and 5147 in the urban areas, making a total of 51441 Shikshakarmis. The Shikshakarmis represent 15.33 per cent of the strength of the regular teachers. There are also 24093 ad-hoc teachers, servicing 23790 education guarantee scheme schools.

The adult literacy program is handled by the "Padhna-Badhna" (meaning: Study-Progress) scheme, which has its own ‘gurujis’ (teachers). This radically revamped strategy for literacy was launched in Madhya Pradesh at the initiative of the former Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh. Under this, non-literate people (in the age group 15-50 years) came together in groups of twenty to thirty as Padhna Badhna Samitis. They engaged local educated persons to be their teacher (Guruji). The state government's role was restricted to training the teachers and the evaluation of learners. After the evaluation, based on the number of learners made literate an honorarium or "gurudakshina" was paid to the teachers individually by the learner for which funds were made available by the government.

Under this strategy, the non-literate people came together as the Padhna Badhna Samitis. About two lakh Padhna-Badhna Samitis are active in rural and urban areas of the state. Many teachers, grassroots functionaries,
pensioners and educated youth in villages have responded to this scheme and have become gurujis of Padhna-Badhna Samitis.

Training and teaching-learning material to the teacher is provided by the nearest ‘Jan Shiksha Kendra’ (mass education centre). After the completion of the three primers stipulated by the National Literacy Mission, another primer on rights is dealt with. This primer enables the learners to know their rights and to get acquainted with various legal provisions in respect of forest, land and gender issues. The fourth primer also provides information on development schemes and formation and functioning of self-help groups.

This model involves the Panchayats adequately unlike the Total Literacy Campaign which was conceived before Panchayat Raj was established in the state. The previous scheme was also seen to be more expensive with three sequential phases of Literacy, Post-Literacy and Continuing Education. While the Literacy phase was expected to impart basic literacy, the Post-Literacy phase was expected to promote livelihood skills and Continuing Education phase was to sustain literacy through libraries etc. Under the new strategy, collective action based on existing social bonds becomes the starting point and gets reinforced as people undergo learning. By integrating the scheme with the Jan Shiksha Kendras of the school education stream, sustained academic support for continuing the education is also taken care of. Apart from this it was seen that after the initial
enthusiasm energies waned in the absence of incentives.  

The Padna Badhna Scheme aims to meet people’s demand for literacy. But do people in fact demand literacy the way they would demand a road, a hospital or even a primary school for their children? Or do the Government, Civil Society organizations, NGOs and Panchayati Raj Institutions need to take on the role of catalysts and stimulate such a demand? However it is still too early to say whether adult literacy would seldom be the felt need of the people in the same way as food, clothing and shelter.

One aspect of education, which seems to be totally neglected in this state is skill development. It had been suggested that the teaching of professional courses at school level should be vastly expanded so that the largest possible number of students could develop skills which would allow them to enter a widely expanded labor market. Very little seems to have been done in this behalf. According to a statement made in 2002 by MN Buch Chairman National Center for Human Settlements & Environment, Bhopal, the bureaucracy is strongly opposed to the very idea of skill development and has steadfastly blocked every attempt at expansion of vocational education, despite the fact that the Chief Minister does have a positive attitude towards professionalism and vocationalisation of education.

(www.mp.nic.in)
In 1994, The Government of Madhya Pradesh converted selected programmes into Rajiv Gandhi Missions and among them, one of the most important has been the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission for basic education. The Shiksha Mission in 1997 introduced an Education Guarantee Scheme to universalise primary education in the quickest possible time through partnership with local communities (www.mp.nic.in). Madhya Pradesh was able to reach a primary schooling facility to every habitation by 1998 through the Education Guarantee Scheme. The goal set for the Rajiv Gandhi Shiksha Mission was to universalize primary education by 1998 and accelerate the movement towards total literacy in the state. The Mission was able to achieve both these goals on schedule. It universalized access to primary schooling in the state by August 1998. The first goal of universalizing primary education was implemented by pioneering an Education Guarantee Scheme and adding over 31,000 new primary schools. Every village has now a school in Madhya Pradesh, in fact every habitation in a tribal area where there are 25 children of school-going age. Any community with 25 learners in a tribal area and 40 learners in a non-tribal area who do not have a school within one kilometer of the habitation has the right to demand a school, which the state guarantees to provide within 90 days thereby creating a rights-based framework for primary education for the first time. The state government later expanded the mandate of the Shiksha Mission to universalize access to Elementary Education — to provide a Middle School facility within every 3 kilometers.
The Mission is set to achieve this goal also by June 2003. [www.educationforallinindia.com, www.ssa.nic.in]

In the area of adult literacy, the Mission succeeded in pushing the literacy rate of the state by an unprecedented 20% catching up with the national average and shedding the obnoxious **Bimaru** (sick) tag in this area. Female literacy jumped over 21%, in fact more than the cumulative rise in the three decades from sixties to nineties and winning for the state, the country’s Decadal Achievement Award in Female Literacy. In spite of the increase registered in comparative terms, female literacy continues as the major challenge in this sector. In terms of replication of the models worked through by these Missions, variants of the Education Guarantee Scheme piloted by the state went on to Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa and in 2001 was adopted by the Government of India as a national scheme. (www.accu.or.jp)

The State has started programmes that are being implemented for Universalisation of Elementary Education and equity. These progarammes are as follows:

- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).
- National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL).
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyala Yojna (KGBV).
However, observers note that while these reforms have increased physical access to schools, quality-wise this new system does not deviate much from the old system and is characterized by the same set of practices that account for malfunctioning of the public educational system (Leclercq, 2002 as cited in econpapers.repec.org).

Moreover, these educational reforms, focusing on ‘alternative schools’ create a second track school system which can lead to increased enrolment in the short run; in the long run, they contribute to further social differentiation and social inequality (Dreze and Sen, 2002).

Moreover, the quality of ‘literates’ of the school system is very low. The actual quantity of schooling that children experience and the quality of teaching they receive are extremely insufficient to any mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills. This seems to be true of both the educationally more advanced states as well as the educationally backward states. Leclercq (2002) in his study of two districts of Madhya Pradesh found that in most schools he visited, few children could read their basic texts fluently. The emphasis was on rote learning and there was little attempt in teaching activities to impart understanding or comprehension of the text.

1.4.2. Current Literacy State in Uttar Pradesh
A review of educational development in the state of Uttar Pradesh reveals that the goal of universalizing elementary education in a resource-poor state seems to be elusive in the near future. Neither the financing pattern of education per se nor elementary education in particular is conducive to achieving the target of universal elementary education. The magnitude of out-of-school children (leaving or dropped-out children) vis-à-vis the resources allocated toward elementary education provides a gloomy picture in the state. Financing the additional resources required to universalize elementary education in the state would require significant reallocations in overall expenditure with federal assistance, since the fiscal situation in Uttar Pradesh is highly imbalanced. The state and central government should bear the entire responsibility of funding and ensure the twin principles of equity and efficiency in the public education system in the state. This requires an indomitable political commitment in terms of reorientation of spending priorities and improving the efficiency of resource use in the state. This study reaffirms that the goal of universal elementary education could become a reality only if there is a joint commitment between the federal and state polities. The 2001 census shows the following literacy rate in this state (www.nlm.nic.in):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/UT</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>57.36</td>
<td>70.23</td>
<td>42.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(figures shown in percentage)

In some villages, the building is used by the teachers for residential purposes. Elsewhere, the school premises are used as a store (Sarwana in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh), police camp (Baruhi, Bhojpur, Bihar), to dry cowdung cakes
(Mujahidpur, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh), as a cattle shed (Belri Salehpur, Hardwar, Uttar Pradesh) and a public latrine (Vangaon, Saharsa, Bihar) (www.flonet.com).

These are extreme cases but even the "typical" school boasts little more than two classrooms, a leaking roof, a couple of blackboards and a table and chair for the headmaster. The probe survey found 82 per cent of the schools needed repair. Two-thirds had leaking roofs, making it difficult to hold classes during the rains. (India Today Oct 13 1997 as cited in www.ashanet.org ). The problems of education system is challenging. Due to public apathy the schools are in disarray, privately run school are functional, but beyond the reach of ordinary people. The State government has taken programmes to make the population totally literate. There are special programmes like World Bank aided DPEP (District Primary Education Programme). Steps are being taken with the help of NGOs and other organizations to raise popular participation (www.upgov.nic.in).

Prior to 1972, the primary and upper primary education in Uttar Pradesh were run, maintained and controlled by District Boards and Town Areas committees, municipalities including corporations etc. constituted under various acts related to management of local bodies i.e.


Considering urgent need to improve literacy in the state, it was felt that education needed planned interventions from the state Government. In this background, the Government of Uttar Pradesh passed The Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Act, 1972 (U.P. Act No. 34 of 1972) (www.upefa.com).

The main objective of this act is to organise, co-ordinate and control imparting of basic education in schools other than high schools or intermediate colleges. By this Act, an Autonomous Body named "Uttar Pradesh Board of Basic Education" was constituted under chairmanship of the Director, Basic Education. All schools which were managed and controlled by local bodies have since then been transferred to the Board. The Board of Basic Education controls the transfer and posting of basic school teachers, determines school timings and gives recognition to private schools imparting basic education in the state.

Uttar Pradesh Board of Basic Education Act 1972 has been amended in year 2000, incorporating principle of devolution of powers to the village community and management of education has been decentralised for empowering grassroots participatory agencies. Other acts relating to basic education were also amended and most crucial one has been in United Provinces Panchayati Raj Act. 1947 where in there is a committee for each village or group of villages called Gram Shiksha Samiti whose constitution is as follows:

- Gram Pradhan - Chairman
Gram Shiksha Samiti would establish, control and plan basic schools in its panchayat areas. It would prepare plans for development and improvement of the schools. Major functions also include giving advice regarding building and other improvement plans to Zila Panchayat. The Parishad shall act as an autonomous and independent body for implementation of the Uttar Pradesh Education For All Project (Hereinafter referred to as "the Project") as outlined in the Project Document published by the Government of Uttar Pradesh and its revised version that may be prepared on the basis of review from time to time. The activities of the Parishad will be concentrated in selected districts, but may extend to the whole State of U.P. in respect of selected and sponsored projects. The Parishad has been established to function as a societal mission for bringing about a fundamental change in the basic education system, and through it in the overall socio-cultural situation. The following specific objects of the Project would be pursued by the Parishad:

Keeping the motive of strengthening basic education, a World Bank assisted project called Basic Education Project had been undertaken initially since 1993, for expansion of quality basic education in the state. For smooth running of this project, a society "Uttar Pradesh Sabhee Ke Liye Shiksha Pariyojana Parishad"
(U.P. Education for all Project Board) has been established on 17 May, 1993 under Societies Registration Act of 1860. It's objects are :-

1. Universalisation of Primary Education, viewed as a composite programme of (i) access to primary education for all children up to 14 years of age; (ii) universal participation till they complete the primary stage through formal or non-formal education programmes; and (iii) universal achievement at least of the minimum levels of learning.

2. Provision of continuing education and skill development programmes for youth.


4. Making necessary intervention to provide equal educational opportunity to children belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the poorest sections of society.

5. Laying special emphasis on all educational activities on culture and communication; science and environment and inculcation of a sense of social justice (www.worldbank.org).

DPEP began towards end of 1994 as a modest effort for providing financial and technical assistance to selected states in the country towards achieving the objectives of universal primary education. The DPEP started in 42 districts spread over seven states. It now covers 271 districts spread over eighteen states and is perhaps the largest ever programme of primary education development in the
world. It has been initiated in the state of Uttar Pradesh, as DPEP-II in year 1997 (1997-2003) in 22 districts. The programme is being implemented by U.P. Education for all Project Board (www.education.nic.in). Specifically, DPEP aims to develop and implement in the project districts, a replicable, sustainable and cost-effective programme in order to (www.upefa.com):

- Reduce differences in enrolment, dropout and learning achievement among gender and social groups to less than 5%.
- Reduce overall primary dropout rate for all student to less than 10%.
- Raise average achievement level by at least 25% over measured baseline assessment level and ensure achievement of basic literacy and numeracy competencies and a minimum of 40% achievement level in other competencies by all primary school children.
- Provide according to norms, access for all children to primary education (classes I-V) through primary schooling wherever possible or its equivalent non-formal education.
- Strengthen the capacity of national, state and district level institutions and organisations for planning, management and evaluation of primary education.