Chapter 6

Lessons Learnt
As stated in the Introduction to this thesis, the present study is an exploration of the ways participants see an enabling programme. One of the basic aims of the National Literacy Mission was to make people functionally literate. According to the NLM document functional literacy is "achieving self-reliance in literacy and numeracy; becoming aware of the causes of their deprivation and moving towards amelioration of their condition through organisation, and participation in the process of development; acquiring skills to improve the economic status and general well being; imbibing the values of national integration, conservation of the environment, women's equality, observance of small family norms, etc."\(^1\)

Based on the qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with 29 respondents belonging to various categories as mentioned in the Introduction and quantitative data collected from 120 other respondents, this chapter attempts to analyse how respondents saw themselves in the literacy initiative.

Of the 120 respondents who were approached for quantitative data, there were 60 male and female respondents each. A total of 68 of these respondents (men and women together) lived an "above-poverty-line" (APL) life and the remaining 52 belonged to "below-poverty-line" (BPL) families, as shown below in Table 1. Data pertaining to respondents have been compared only on the parameters of gender and economic conditions.

These respondents could be divided into three age groups: below 35, 36 to 45, and above 46. Age was not a criterion in the analysis, yet the respondents were divided into three age groups to elicit an idea of how old the respondents were. The National Literacy Mission aimed at imparting literacy skills to people falling in the age group 15-35. However, in many cases people falling beyond the age group were also enrolled in the classes.

All the respondents who fell into the third age group, ie, above 46 at the time of data gathering were obviously above 35 when the National Literacy Mission programme was
The idea of the quantitative survey was not to assess the impact of the National Literacy Mission. This exercise has been done at a number of places by a number of agencies and individuals. The summary of some of the tables does read like an assessment of the Mission, but essentially these data were sought to have an understanding of the impact the mission left. These data when posited with the qualitative data cited in this chapter and the transcription of the small group discussion helped the research student draw inferences.
It must be borne in mind that the National Literacy Mission was planned and designed by a State agency and as such was a state initiative. It was implemented and evaluated with the help of civil society, but in these two processes the control of the State was much too obvious, as has been explained in the preceding pages. At some places implementation was delegated to semi-government institutions and evaluation, too, was entrusted to them.

This chapter attempts to see how the respondents --- mutually exclusive and divided into (i) learners, (ii) teachers, (iii) supervisors, and (iv) representatives of implementing agencies --- saw themselves in the literacy initiative, how they saw themselves in the hierarchy of the scheme, and how they saw their relationship with each other. An attempt has been made to study how the participant-learners constructed their identities as literate and how they negotiated the environment around them while participating in a learning process, a process that is essentially participatory.

6.1. Ethnography

Learner-respondents are primarily from two villages of Ahmedabad: Narimanpura (identified as “Na” while quoting the respondents) and Naroda (identified as “Nrd”). Narimanpura is about eight kilometres south-west of Ahmedabad, the largest city of the west Indian state of Gujarat while Naroda village is in the north-east of Ahmedabad. While Naroda village was already a part of the extended limits of the Municipal Corporation of Ahmedabad, Narimanpura was in 2006 incorporated in the Ahmedabad “mega city” limits.

**Narimanpura:**

Narimanpura, a small village of about 900 households, is well connected to Ahmedabad by an all-weather road on which ply state transport buses providing the residents easy access to the city. The village has an even population of Hindus and Muslims who live in housing clusters spread across. There hardly is a family belonging to any other
denomination. Agriculture is the chief occupation of the people, though there are quite a few who work in the city either in government offices or private concerns.

The village does not have a history of inter-religious discord and it is an example of communal harmony. Though Muslims are in a minority, it has a Muslim sarpanch Hussainbhai Master, who seems to be carrying the entire panchayat (the village council) with him.

“Well, I have never thought of which God he worships.... I don’t think that (religious faith) is anything that will affect for whom I vote in the panchayat election.... In fact, I think he is the sarpanch because he is educated, gentlemanly, has done a good job and helps everyone.” This is how Shakti Parmar, a resident of Narimanpura, describes Hussainbhai Master. It also gives a fair idea of the prevailing social fabric of Narimanpura. The village remained peaceful even as Ahmedabad city, barely eight kilometres away burnt during the communal violence early in 2002. The Hindus and the Muslims live in separate “vaas” (a cluster of houses in which people of a certain religion or caste live), as is common in most Indian villages, but the village mosque and a couple of Hindu religious places remained untouched.

The village school has classes I to VIII. It is in close proximity of the Muslim vaas, almost at the entrance of the village. Children of the Hindus and the Muslims continue to attend classes just as they did before 2002.

“Our village does not have that Hindu-Muslim thing.... I am proud of this. If there were any (communal feelings) I would never have been elected Sarpanch,” says Hussainbhai Master.

Momins and Maleks mostly make up the Muslim community. Both are mainly into agriculture. Thakors (farmers), Prajapatis (potters), Valands (barbers) and Vankars (Dalits or the underprivileged) form the Hindu community. A few of them are into their family tradition, but a majority of these people own land and are into farming.
Literacy classes under National Literacy Mission were carried out in Narimanpura in 1990-91. Some of the learners had attended a few literacy classes when they were organised under the National Adult Education Programme in the neighbouring village of Fatehwadi in 1977-78. There has been no follow-up of the National Literacy Mission initiative and consequently nothing has been done as part of Post-Literacy Campaign. However, as the discussions in the following pages bring out, many of the participant-learners would welcome a post-literacy programme and are eager to join it.

Source: Google Earth

As can bee seen in the photograph above, though part of Ahmedabad “mega city,” Narimanpura is far from the main city. The village can be approached form Ahmedabad
either by National Highway Number 8C (seen in the left) or can be approached by taking a state highway that can be seen in the middle of the photograph.
A closer view of Narimanpura is given below.

Source: Google Earth

**Naroda gaam:**
Though still called a “village,” Naroda is a sprawling industrial zone that was incorporated in the Municipal Corporation of Ahmedabad in 1986. Thanks to industrial development and allied activities, the population of Naroda “village” has swelled from about 35,000 in 1986 to nearly 150,000 in 2003. New neighbourhoods have sprung up around the “village,” referred to as “New Naroda” which is teeming with migrants from
other parts of Gujarat and other states. People of all castes live in the area. It is a predominantly Hindu area. Muslims number about 10,000.

Today’s Naroda is an industrial zone sprawling across more than 25 square kilometres. The newly developed zone has more or less transformed what was once Naroda “village.” What was once a village of a few hundred people on the outskirts of Ahmedabad city is very much a part of the city today with the Municipal Corporation of Ahmedabad responsible for the civic amenities.

Though no survey has been done, it can safely be said that the neighbourhood is a “melting pot” of migrants from various parts of India who have migrated to Ahmedabad in search of livelihood at Ahmedabad’s once flourishing textile mills. Most of the mills are closed today but the migrant workers have made Ahmedabad their home and found jobs in new industrial units that have come up. Some of them even set up their own kiosks selling eatables, “paan” (betel) leaves and sundry items.

The participant-learners with whom this research student interacted were mostly migrants from Gujarat’s neighbouring state of Rajasthan. Their parents and grandparents had come to Ahmedabad from the Marwar region of Rajasthan in search of livelihood. The neighbourhood in which they live has almost entirely Hindu population though people professing other religions do live in other neighbourhoods of Naroda. Naroda-Patiya, the northern fringe of Naroda witnessed the most gruesome carnage during the communal violence in February-March 2002 when about 80 people were burnt to death and dozens of houses and shops were set ablaze.

Naroda “village” did go through tense moments, but there was no violence in the “village.” The village is represented by Bharatiya Janata Party corporators in the municipal corporation. Naroda itself is represented by a Bharatiya Janata Party legislator in the state Assembly. Corporators were elected in the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation election held before the communal violence, whereas the legislator retained
the constituency in the assembly election held a little more than nine months after the violence broke out.

Employees of non-government organisations carried out National Literacy Mission classes in Naroda village and surrounding areas in 1990-91 for three months. These classes were followed by post-literacy campaign, but in the surrounding areas, not in the village. These post-literacy campaign classes are still being carried out even as this report is being written.

As can be seen in the photograph below, Naroda gaam or village has become very much a part of the city.
6.2. Literacy, as participants see it

### When an adult literacy campaign evolves around the syllabification of 'ba-be-bi-bo-bu' instead of discussing the national reality with all its difficulties, and instead of raising the issue of the people's political participation in the reinvention of their society, it creates false discourse.³

### The social opportunities offered by market-based economic growth, particularly of integration with modern world markets, are severely limited when a very large part of the community cannot read...
or write or count, cannot follow printed or hand-written instructions, cannot cope easily with contemporary technology, and so on.4

## (...) for many everyday purposes literacy is defined exclusively in relation to particular social roles, pre-existing institutions and transaction, and finite bodies of information.5

## (...) literacy is above all a technology or set of techniques for communications and for decoding and reproducing written or printed materials: it cannot be taken as anything more or less.6

Defining literacy poses some problem, indeed, with a horde of experts expressing their views on it. However, there is an agreement that it connotes aspects of reading and writing while the debate continues on what specific abilities or knowledge count as literacy. To Galtung7 literacy is that skill which leads to making people conscious; to Freire8 it should lead to conscientisation.

Literacy does not simply involve decoding of printed word or symbol as sound and vice versa. At the centre of it is meaning. People are constantly occupied in making meaning. Simply comprehending a text with a view to repeating it at a later time is not enough. Complete comprehension involves understanding what the writer (or speaker) means by reference to what has not been said as well as to what has been said by comparison with material, ideas, and knowledge outside the immediate text and by analysis of the writer's purposes and of how the message has been coded --- its language, style, register or code. As Cashdan9 puts it, literacy involves the use of many inputs over and above the immediate message, in terms of context and of analysis.

6.3. National Literacy Mission: How participants see it

At the core of the informed debate on India's literacy initiatives is the question: "What is literacy?" The hierarchy of the players in literacy domain is something like this: planners,
the implementing agencies, the supervisors, volunteer-teachers and participant-learners. In between the implementing agencies and the learners there could be motivators, too. These motivators are sometimes local opinion leaders and sometimes higher government officials. They could be popular personalities like film actors and political, social, cultural and religious-spiritual leaders, too.

To many, literacy is but a component in a composite canvass of life. They cannot see literacy having a role independent of other skills, facilities and opportunities in life.

Views of some contemporary scholars have been cited in the previous unit in this chapter. What follows is a discussion on space these participant-learners saw themselves occupying in the literacy discourse. The discussion follows the argument cited in the Introduction to this dissertation that people’s own definition of the situation is an important element of any social process, even if it does not provide a complete account or explanation and may include self-justificatory reports (Semin and Manstead, 1983).

6.3.1. An individual's space in the cauldron of hierarchy: Motivation and Mobilisation:

## Every cultural pattern and every single act of social behaviour involves communication in either an explicit or implicit sense.

Just as "culture conditions the colours we see" one's space in a community tempers one's perception of a social process. One's decision to join the process and be part of it seems to stem from one's social status, too.

In the National Literacy Mission that we have discussed so far, these facts come out time and again. For example, Take the case of TNa-1 (F, 53, APL, mother of four children), now a principal of a school but a teacher in 1990-91 when she participated in the literacy classes as an instructor:
"Our principal (TNa-2) told us that we are expected to teach people of this village how to read and write.... Later I thought it was our social responsibility, too...."

To TNa-1 (F, 53, APL, mother of four children), it was being "told to participate in the programme," for she was a "teacher in a government school where we are required to do as mandated by GRs (government resolutions) and instructed by the principal. TNa-1's voluntarism was a result of her relationship with the superior, the principal, whom she is supposed to obey. The principal, in turn gets orders from the DEO (district education officer)."

As TNa-6 (F, 33, APL, mother of two, lives in a joint family), still a teacher in the same village and the same school, said:

"Where was the question of seeking our opinion or taking our consent? Just a 'come-and-teach' notice and we had two alternatives to choose from: either teach or quit the job. Now can you afford to give up a government job?"

The government resolution as passed on by the District Education Officer did not say "either teach or quit the job" but the teachers of state-funded schools have little choice. The government advice is as good as an order that can be defied or overlooked at one's own peril.

This, for the lowest link on the implementation side of the literacy initiative. To the link one notch above, as in the case of TNa-2 (M, 61, APL, father of four children, then school principal), voluntarism emanated from his official duty to motivate teachers of his school to lend their service. TNa-2, since retired, also felt that being the chief official (principal) of the only seat of learning (secondary school) in the village, it was his moral duty to patronise and take charge of such a "noble exercise."
"In a way I was the 'head teacher' of the village. You know, I was the principal of the only school in a cluster of villages. The officials expected me to take charge of the literacy classes and the villagers looked up to me when it came to education. Besides, I feel being the principal of the school, it was my moral duty to take the lead...."

"Moral duty" and "social responsibility" emerge as two important driving forces for the teachers-volunteers. The volunteer-teachers from Gujarat Vidyapith, too, found it to be their moral responsibility to participate in the initiative. Coming from a seat of learning founded by the Father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, most of them felt morally obliged to offer their services. For SS-2 (F, 49, lecturer, mother of two):

"... there were others before Mahatma Gandhi who worked for removal of illiteracy, but it is the Mahatma who makes us aware of our social responsibility in this respect: 'niraksharta, ae kalank chhe... (illiteracy is a sin, it must be liquidated...),’ he says and our institution (Gujarat Vidyapith) has adopted his slogan. Who will make his dream come true, if not we?

"I was inspired by Gandhiji's ideals. When in jail he wrote to the women in Sabarmati Ashram12: ‘Read whenever you can.’ Gandhiji wanted society to be literate so he asked women to read. If women are literate, the family gets education.... Gandhiji also said take spiritual knowledge from the gyanus (scholar-saints), but learn alphabets from who ever you can where ever you can.

"Obviously, Gandhiji wanted people to be not just literate but educated, too. Hence our stress was on making the learners/neo-literate ask questions, when they could not understand, what they could not understand.

"Gujarat Vidyapith has social projects every now and then. We have done plantation campaigns in the past, Narmada,13 adult education14, etc. We
have had NSS camps on health and hygiene every year. This was another such camp for us. Part of the GV way of life.

"We did the campaign through chats, talks, discussions, dance, drama, culture programmes. Women took a number of initiatives in the entire campaign.

Another participant, SS-1 (F, 51, a professor, mother of two) in the literacy programme from the same institution airs similar views:

“Our institute was committed to spreading literacy. It was already working in this direction at Shahdra. It was doing social work like spreading cleanliness, health and hygiene. So when the National Literacy Mission was launched our institute decided to support it. We joined it. As a teacher I had to go.”

Gujarat Vidyapith is a member of the National Service Scheme, a scheme to tap the potential of the college-going youth of India for social service. The National Literacy Mission had roped in schools, colleges, and universities as sectoral allies in the programme. These educational institutions, in turn, got the members of the National Service Scheme involved in the initiative. This turns out to be a good example of the activation of the inter-sectoral chain: roping in educational institutions leads to involvement of the large pool of members of National Service Scheme as volunteers.

To SNa-1 (M, 58, educated, an agriculturist, a panchayat member) it was a “moral responsibility” to pass on the talent and ability that God gave her:

“No there were no expectations of a monetary reward. Nor were there any expectations of any kind. It was a voluntary work and I got involved considering it as a humanitarian work. God gave me some talent and ability. I think I must pass on to others what God gave me.”
The learners saw the programme that could open a new avenue to economic activity, an avenue that could help them gain in self-esteem, or simply to “keep pace with changing times.” To LNrd-1 (F, 35, APL, a supervisor in a diamond polishing unit)

“(…) I went on my own. Ben (female teacher) was coming to teach so there was no problem. I was interested in the class as I thought it (literacy skills) could get me a job. If there were a male teacher it would have been a little embarrassing.”

To LNrd-2 (F, 22, BPL, a mother of two, a housemaid)

“It is important (to be literate). In this modern world when time is changing so fast, the world is moving ahead, we should know to read and write. Otherwise we will be left behind.

“When the people around you know to read and write you cannot afford to be ignorant. Here are so many things that they will know and they will steal a march over you. They will make progress and you will be left in your place, cooling your heels.”

To LNrd-4 (F, 29, BPL, a mother of three, a housemaid)

“When we go out, it looks good if you know to read and write. You cut a very sorry figure if you don’t know to read…

“I was very interested in learning to read and write. I was so interested that I attended the classes lying in my bed. I had a 12-day-old child when the classes began. Luckily the classes were being held on my verandah, so I did not have to go out and I could take care of the infant even while sitting through the classes.”

The discussion does raise the issue of the programme raising the expectations of the participants that could lead to frustration in the event of the participants not being able to
attain the objective with which they joined the programme. The general lack of delivery system as revealed during the focus group discussions (discussed in the following chapter) could only add to the learners’ woes.

Besides, the discussion also brings to the fore the gender segregation that is prevalent in the urban/suburban society, particularly if it is largely illiterate. LNrd-1 thought that she did not face hurdles in attending the classes because it was a woman who was conducting the classes. She was not sure if she could have attended the programme if a male teacher were in place of the “ben” (the female teacher).

And some, like LNa-7 (F, 49, APL, a housewife, a mother of three), joined the classes simply because the programmes to make potential learners aware of the classes and the merits of being literate worked on them.

“I saw the dance, drama in the village. The "Yuvak Mandal" (Youth Association) and the Yuvati Mandal (Women/Girl's Association) they all visited me at home. They talked to us and I was convinced of the importance of literacy.

“Yes, enjoyed a lot... learnt to read and write, and at the same time, we staged plays, did "Garba" (traditional Gujarati dance) to portray the ills prevalent in society.

“Also, we went on picnic and small tour. All this was a great learning experience.”

The tables below show how the participant-learners looked at the literacy programme.
Table 6.2
Who / what inspired you to join literacy classes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Colleagues</th>
<th>Hope of learning a new skill</th>
<th>Advertisements on television</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17 (22.33)</td>
<td>17 (22.33)</td>
<td>02 (3.3)</td>
<td>11 (18.3)</td>
<td>23 (38.3)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>07 (11.6)</td>
<td>02 (3.3)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>31 (51.6)</td>
<td>20 (33.3)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>13 (19.1)</td>
<td>02 (2.9)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>30 (44.1)</td>
<td>23 (33.8)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>11 (21.1)</td>
<td>07 (13.4)</td>
<td>02 (3.8)</td>
<td>12 (23)</td>
<td>20 (38.4)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Figures in parantheses denote the percentage)

This table reflects the motivating factor in joining the literacy classes. The eagerness to learn a new skill was hardly visible. Family and peer groups were a major influencing factor for men joining the literacy classes, whereas advertisements on television were a major factor for women. Television advertisements again played a bigger role for those living above poverty line joining literacy classes than did family or colleagues.

After television advertisements, family members emerge as the second most influential group/ factor. Overall, it appears that through the media and other means, an environment was created in which to be illiterate was seen as an embarrassment and literacy was seen as a means of engaging with a rapidly changing world and possibly improving one’s social status.

It is worth noting that “other” factor(s) (those other than family, colleagues, hope of learning a new skill and advertisements on television) constitutes more than a third of the responses in each category. Though not each respondent specified what was / were other factor(s), a large number of those who did specify the “other” said puppet shows, rallies, interpersonal and group meetings with volunteer-teachers, were some of the factors that inspired them most to join the literacy classes. It is obvious that direct contact attracted the most number of people to the literacy programme.
Table 6.3
How often did you attend classes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Every alternate day</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>As and when I felt like attending</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14 (23.3)</td>
<td>22 (36.6)</td>
<td>01 (1.6)</td>
<td>03 (5)</td>
<td>20 (33.3)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>02 (3.3)</td>
<td>11 (18.3)</td>
<td>01 (1.6)</td>
<td>25 (41.6)</td>
<td>21 (35)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>13 (19.1)</td>
<td>24 (35.2)</td>
<td>01 (1.4)</td>
<td>05 (7.3)</td>
<td>25 (36.7)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>03 (5.7)</td>
<td>09 (17.3)</td>
<td>01 (1.9)</td>
<td>23 (44.2)</td>
<td>16 (30.7)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More men than women said they attended classes daily. Similarly more people living above poverty line attended classes than did those living below poverty line. The difference between women and men attending classes “as and when I felt like attending” is wide.

Similar was the response for those living above poverty line and those living below poverty line.

The wide gap could perhaps be because women had household chores to be completed before they could proceed to attend classes, and those living below poverty line had to devote more time to manage the ends meet than those living above poverty line.

This finding corroborates the finding in the previous section of this chapter.

6.3.1.a. Differences in perception: Based on the discussion above, it is obvious that there were differences in the way the participant-learners and the voluntary-teachers and supervisors saw the literacy programme. Schematically these differences are depicted below:

**Participant learners**

# Opportunity to learn
a new skill, alternative to formal

**Volunteer-teachers and supervisors**

# Government duty/ Social responsibility
moral responsibility, extension of
schooling/ occasion to make up for lost opportunity

# Opportunity for social interaction

# Enabling process (could lead to job and hence better economic condition), to stay with times, to become self-reliant, overcome shame and embarrassment, leading to better parenting.

# Personal / social development

# Beneficial for self/ community

# Embarrassing (due to wide age range: 15 to 45 despite the plan being meant for age group 15-35)

# Session for exchanging solution to personal and social problems

# Sometime tiresome, sometime useful

# Should be an on-going affair

# Socialisation

volunteerism

# (Gandhi) tradition to uphold/ social interaction/ personal interest/ break from household chores/ humanitarian work/ God’s work

# Conscientisation

# Personal satisfaction (higher need gratification)

# Beneficial for individual learners/ community/ nation

# Condescending (“... they looked up to us for solution to their problems...”)

# Sometime forced duty, sometime change from the routine life, sometime burden, sometime satisfying

# Should be an on-going affair, but should involve paid teachers, supervisors

# Socialisation

It is also worthwhile to note how participant-learners and volunteer-teachers and supervisors saw each other
6.3.2. **What is literacy?** The space one occupies in a social set-up, one’s need and responsibilities could be the determining factor for one’s understanding of literacy.

An attempt was made to understand the skill that the volunteer-teachers were expected to impart to the participant-learners. For many, literacy could be defined exclusively in relation to particular social roles, pre-existing institutions and transaction, for some literacy is a technology or set of techniques for communications and for decoding and reproducing written or printed materials.

Take the case of LNa-1 (M, 39, BPL, a father of three, an agriculturist) to whom literacy meant being able to sign a paper. In the absence of the ability to sign LNa-1 was exposed to the possibility of signing a paper without ascertaining for himself what he was signing on. Being illiterate meant living in a world of exploitation in which the ruling political class, the lending agency (often an individual village usherer) or a middle man could take undue advantage of his lack of literacy.

"Literacy? One should know how to read and write. One should be able to sign a paper."

Literacy to others could also be an important tool in elevating one’s social standing. To LNrd-4 (F, 29, BPL, a mother of three, a housemaid),

"When we go out, it looks good if you know to read and write. You cut a very sorry figure if you don’t know to read."

To LNa-2 (M, 41, BPL, a father of three, an agriculturist, Lna-1’s brother),

"It is important (to be literate). In this modern world when time is changing so fast, the world is moving ahead, we should know to read and write. Otherwise we will be left behind."
“When the people around you know to read and write you cannot afford to be ignorant. There are so many things that they will know and they will steal a march over you. They will make progress and you will be left in your place, cooling your heels.”

Raised awareness of their surrounding and participation in the reinvention of their society and redefining of the social hierarchy and their space therein could be literacy. Literacy could also be increased participation in political and economic activities and forging of new linkages and taking up opportunities offered by market-based economic growth, particularly of integration with modern world markets.

To LNa-4 (M, 47, APL, a father of five, a grocer),

“It was good for my own life. I should not be left behind as society moves ahead. That is why I joined the literacy class.
“Besides, education helps you in getting on to the right selection on vocation. These days it is difficult to land a job. If you are educated you can start your own business. Besides, if you are educated one cannot cheat you in your business or in other fields.”

To LNa-7 (F, 49, APL, a housewife, a mother of three),

“You gain knowledge by becoming literate. This helps you in moving ahead because you can count and keep your accounts. You can keep track of what is happening in society and understand why it is happening. Others cannot take you for granted.”

To supervisors and teachers who have had higher education, are involved in imparting higher education and who deliberate on the concept of education in seminars and at other informed fora, literacy is a broader concept. Says SS-1 (F, 51, a mother of two, a professor):
"Literacy, like education, is a broader concept. It should help you understand the problem you face and give you the insight to solve it using your wisdom.... I shall call a person literate who apart from being able to read and write should be aware of child's health.

"As we say in Gujarati, one should be ‘ganela’ (aware and enlightened) not just ‘bhanela’ (literate and educated). A literate person should be able to adjust to his/her environment, s/he should be able to live a community life."

To TS-1 (F, 42, married, a lecturer),

"Literacy is useful for ‘akshar gyan,’ but not so useful for their day-to-day life. We realised this right in the beginning of the programme. So we allocated some time for chat/discussion every day at the beginning of the classes or after the class.

"The learners really enjoyed this part of the class as they found some outlet for their feelings and sometimes solution to their problems, too."

The similarity in the views of LNa-4 (M, 47, APL, a father of five, a grocer) and LNa-7 (F, 49, APL, a housewife, a mother of three), and SS-1 (F, 51, APL, a mother of two, a professor) and TS-1 (F, 42, APL, a married, a lecturer) on literacy is striking. Though there exists a vast difference in their level of formal education and economic background, they share some similar views on literacy: that the ability to analyse one’s environment, think and reason out a solution to one’s problem is literacy.

6.3.2.a. What it means to be literate: The dichotomy of literate, and hence a small and happy, family versus illiterate, and hence a large and a family in distress is at the core of one of the lessons discussed in Chapter 4. The learners are expected to be influenced by the illustration and the text. Schematically, this is what is portrayed in the lesson:
**Literate**
# Modern
# Aware
# Agile
# Active
# Amenable to change
# Small family
# Plenty to eat
# Resourceful
# Sends girl child to school
# Moves with time, looks forward and braces up
# Life is bountiful

**Illiterate**
# Conservative
# Ignorant
# Laid back
# Passive
# Rigid
# Large family
# Stalked by hunger
# Helpless
# Detains girl child for household chores
# Lives in the past, ignorant of opportunities and challenges ahead
# Life is full of misery and is like hell

As against the above, this is how learners saw the literate (themselves) and the illiterate mostly living in their immediate environs in the suburb or the village:

**Literate**
# We
# Motivated
# Committed (to the literacy programme)
# Moving with time
# Can appreciate and make use of things that could improve quality of life (e.g., health, hygiene, children’s education, etc)
# Belong to the mainstream
# Are smarter now (Cannot

**Illiterate**
# We/ some of us/ them
# Less motivated
# Helpless (held back by circumstances, other commitments)
# Left behind
# Lack extra skills
# Left behind/ marginalised
# Prone to being cheated
be cheated)
# Self-sufficient for calculation and correspondence
# Productive members of society
# Appreciate small family norms better
# In the know of planners' plans
# Can quickly adopt changes/ innovations in agricultural/ professional practices
# Appreciates societal and environmental problems
# Joins hands to tackle these problems
# Assumes leadership
# Politically active literate
# Sensitised to gender equality
# Dependent
# Productive members of society
# Would take time to understand the benefits of small family
# Not in the know of planners’ plans
# Resistant to change/ late in adopting changes/ innovations
# Appreciative of societal and environmental problems
# Joins hands to tackle these problems
# Leaves decision-making to literate
# Politically active, but mostly as followers
# Very few sensitised to gender equality

6.3.3. Felt benefits of and liking for the programme: The initiatives under the National Literacy Mission have been evaluated across the country. Gujarat Institute of Development Research and Sardar Patel Institute of Social and Economic Research evaluated the initiatives in Gujarat. There have been some damning references in these reports and discussed in the previous chapter.

However, when looked at from the learners’, volunteer-teachers’ and supervisors’ perspectives, these initiatives do come out with some merit. They did have some suggestions to make the initiatives more fruitful. These have been discussed in the next sub-section.
Benefits could accrue at varied levels. It could be at the personal level and at the community level, as the learners, the volunteer-teachers and the supervisors perceived. Some felt satisfied at a very personal level as they could communicate with their parents without having to share their personal details with an intermediary as earlier they had to seek the help of a person to have their letters written. LNrd-1 (F, 35, APL, a supervisor in a diamond cutting unit) even saw this as her empowerment as after acquiring literacy skills she could decide for herself “when to write and when not to:”

“... learnt a lot. I learnt to read and write. It took me about a month to do so. I was very pleased when I could write a letter to my parents. I was writing a letter for the first time in my life. I felt as if I suddenly became independent. I did not have to go to someone to get a letter written. Now I would decide when to write the letter and when not to.”

To LNrd-14 (F, 44, a mother of three, a cooking assistant), acquiring literacy skills meant becoming independent of the unknown stranger whom he always used to ask the bus number and its destination:

“I can read the bus number, its destination, read cinema posters, newspapers and, of course, write letters. I don't have to ask someone of the bus number or the destination written over the windscreen in order to catch the right bus for my travel in the city.”

Given the level of poverty and the parents’ inability to pay for their children's education, the drop-out rate is pretty high even in an industrialised and prosperous state like Gujarat. The state’s Socio-Economic review for 2004-05 displays declining drop-out rates at the elementary level. For elementary sections (I-V), the rate reduced from 35.40 per cent in 1996-97 to 17.83 per cent in 2003-04. For the class I-VII category, it decreased from 49.49 per cent to 33.73 per cent over the same period. Yet, compared to other states, this improvement pales into insignificance. In Kerala, for instance, the drop-out rate is less than 2 per cent as against the national average of 25 per cent.
A fact that came out well during the interview with the learners was that many of them, parents as well as children, saw in the literacy mission an occasion to make up for the lost opportunity. Some parents flocked to the classes to learn what they could not due to some circumstances in the past whereas some parents encouraged their children to attend the classes even though these were meant for grown-ups. In a way these classes became an alternative to the formal classes.

“No there was no problem in the class. The family in fact encouraged me to go to classes. Yes, sometimes it was difficult as I used to be tired in the afternoon after completing household chores. Still I went there. I used to feel nice being in the class. I was looking at the prospect of getting a job:” LNrd-10 (F, 33, BPL, a housewife, a mother of three).

“No problems in the classes. Parents encouraged me to go, though they themselves did not go to the classes. Perhaps they thought the classes could in some way compensate for my lack of education. (I dropped out of school after a few years and had forgotten to read and write. “In the class with the help of the Ben (the woman teacher) I learnt it again. It did not take me much time to do so. Today I can read and write without any problems.

“Yes, I liked the class very much because, as I said, I looked at it as making up for my lack of (formal/school) education.

“If there is another similar class I would like to attend it again though I am not sure if my in-laws will allow me to do so. I shall be going to live with my husband after six months or so:” LNrd-2 (F, 22, BPL, a mother of two, a housemaid).

To the more pragmatic, time given to literacy classes was an investment in future. They might not have had any immediate benefit, but they saw their children benefiting if they themselves became literate and more aware of the circumstances they were living in.
“No I could not attend classes regularly. I had household chores to do after being in the field (assisting the senior cook) during the day. My daughter, too, was going to the literacy class, so I often had to stay back for the chores.

“My problem was irregularity in the class. I would not follow what was being taught if I go to the class after three days.” LNrd-3 (F, 40, BPL, a mother of three, a cooking assistant).

“The biggest benefit that I see I had from this class is that I know what my children are reading today. They would have gone to school, studied and I would not have been able to support them if I had remained illiterate. And to be of any help to them, I had to attend school and do you think I could attend school at this age? It would have been next to impossible:” LNrd-4 (F, 29, BPL, a mother of three, a housemaid).

“Look, you progress if you work hard. And I did make some progress. I know to read, write and count. I am no longer dependent on others to tell me what is in the newspapers. I can read my own letters. I don’t have to tell others to read my personal letters:” LNa-5 (F, 33, BPL, a housewife, a mother of three).

6.3.4. Felt economic, individual, and community benefits: Self-confidence, economic and social awareness, better economic opportunities, easier communications (transportation), etc were some of the felt benefits of the participants of the literary mission. Interaction with the volunteer-teachers and occasionally with supervisors, exchange of views with them and development of literacy and numeracy skills gave them confidence in themselves. Their vulnerability against being cheated into unfair contract or agreement and denial of minimum wages were taken care of. Even if they don’t remember the exact lessons as they have forgotten most of the text due to lack of any post-literacy or other follow-up programmes, they do acknowledge that the classes held
as part of the National Literacy Mission did help them in taking a step ahead in life. Take, for example, what LNa-1 (F, 35, APL, a supervisor in a diamond cutting unit) has to say:

“Yes, I feel very confident of myself. None can cheat me now by giving me wrong figures, none can make me sign papers as I can read and write. Now I know the minimum wages I or my fellow workers should be getting. In fact, now I handle 25 workers for my unit owner. He has confidence in me. He gives me more work. Even allows me to carry home the extra job work... Don't remember. It is some years since the classes got over. But they were of use at that time. At least it helped me learn something at that point of time.”

A few tables below show how the 120 respondents felt they benefited individually or how they thought their community benefited by their newly acquired skills.

This is how the respondents from whom quantitative data were sought recounted their utility of the literacy programme:

Table 6.4

Have you made any change in agriculture practice or in your profession in the last few years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>06 (10)</td>
<td>54 (90)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18 (30)</td>
<td>42 (70)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>16 (23.5)</td>
<td>52 (76.4)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>08 (15.3)</td>
<td>44 (84.6)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

228
Table 6.5
If yes, then when did you bring that change?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>06 (100)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>18 (42.8)</td>
<td>24 (57.1)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>17 (56.6)</td>
<td>22 (73.3)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>07 (38.8)</td>
<td>02 (11.1)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Acquisition of new skill to read and write did not lead to any significant change in profession or practices in their (then) current profession, mostly agriculture. Whatever the changes, women outnumbered men 3:1 making use of the new skills.

The figures in Tables 6.4 and 6.5 are a little contradictory. According to Table 6.4 only 18 women or 30 per cent of the women respondents reported change in profession or agriculture practices in 1990 – the year National Literary Mission classes were actually conducted. However, Table 6.5 shows a lot more women registering change in profession or agriculture practices in 1995, a good five years after the National literacy Mission classes had ended. Interestingly, no man reported change after 1990.

While the scope of this study is not to ascertain the reasons for this change, it could be said that (i) women proved to be more amenable to change, (ii) more women changed their profession and agriculture practices between 1990 and 1995. Probably, they interacted with fellow women and saw and adopted the good points in what others had done.

Also notable is the number of people living above poverty line and below poverty line changing profession and agriculture profession in 1990 and 1995. More people living above poverty line in 1990 and 1995 brought about changes but far greater number of people living above poverty line changed their profession and agriculture practices between 1990 and 1995. This was probably because the latter group had greater access to resources required to adopt changes, or maybe their economic conditions allowed them to take the risks involved.
This interesting finding could not be explored further due to the limitations of the scope of this study. This could be explored at some other stage on some other platform.

Table 6.6
How useful were the classes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Somewhat useful</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Wastage of time and resources</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>01 (1.6)</td>
<td>24 (40)</td>
<td>25 (41.6)</td>
<td>05 (8.3)</td>
<td>05 (8.3)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>06 (10)</td>
<td>34 (56.6)</td>
<td>14 (23.3)</td>
<td>06 (10)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>01 (1.4)</td>
<td>12 (17.6)</td>
<td>48 (70.5)</td>
<td>01 (1.4)</td>
<td>05 (8.8)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>18 (34.6)</td>
<td>11 (21.1)</td>
<td>18 (34.6)</td>
<td>05 (9.6)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.7
How interesting were the classes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very interesting</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
<th>Somewhat interesting</th>
<th>Not interesting</th>
<th>Boring</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>17 (28.3)</td>
<td>32 (57.3)</td>
<td>11 (18.3)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>14 (23.3)</td>
<td>20 (33.3)</td>
<td>20 (33.3)</td>
<td>06 (10)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>12 (17.6)</td>
<td>39 (57.3)</td>
<td>12 (17.6)</td>
<td>05 (7.3)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>19 (36.5)</td>
<td>13 (25)</td>
<td>19 (36.5)</td>
<td>01 (1.9)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the options in the two tables were to be represented on a scale of 1 to 5, the response was well neigh nil for one extreme: literacy classes being “very useful” or “very interesting.” Most of the responses fell in the mid-region, that is, useful/interesting, somewhat useful/interesting and not useful/interesting.

As table 6.3 showed, more men attended classes more frequently (daily or on alternate days), Tables 6.6 and 6.7 reveal that more men found the classes useful/interesting than
women. However, more people living below poverty line found those classes useful than those living above poverty line and more people living below poverty line found classes interesting than those living above poverty line.

Table 6.8
Have you taken any step to improve cleanliness and hygiene in your family/ neighbourhood/ village?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>06 (10)</td>
<td>54 (90)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>03 (5)</td>
<td>57 (95)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>07 (10.3)</td>
<td>61 (89.7)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>02 (3.3)</td>
<td>50 (96.7)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 12 and 13 reveal the participant-learners’ awareness of the problems they faced.

Table 6.9
If yes, then when did you last do so?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>01 (16.6)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>05 (83.3)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>01 (50)</td>
<td>01 (50)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>01 (1.4)</td>
<td>06 (85.7)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>01 (100)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.10
What are the major problems that you are facing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating in the decision-making process of panchayat</th>
<th>Caste-based discrimination</th>
<th>Lack of socio-economic opportunities</th>
<th>Other (cite)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>06 (10)</td>
<td>18 (30)</td>
<td>17 (28.3)</td>
<td>19 (31.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>23 (38.3)</td>
<td>19 (31.6)</td>
<td>18 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>03 (4.4)</td>
<td>30 (44.1)</td>
<td>18 (26.4)</td>
<td>17 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>03 (5.7)</td>
<td>11 (21.1)</td>
<td>18 (34.6)</td>
<td>20 (38.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6.11
What did you do to tackle this problem?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formed co-op society</th>
<th>Formed caste association</th>
<th>Formed some other association</th>
<th>Did nothing</th>
<th>Other (cite)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>07 (11.6)</td>
<td>13 (21.6)</td>
<td>28 (46.6)</td>
<td>12 (20)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>09 (10)</td>
<td>09 (15)</td>
<td>40 (66.6)</td>
<td>02 (3.3)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>09 (25)</td>
<td>15 (22)</td>
<td>42 (70)</td>
<td>02 (3.3)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>07 (11.6)</td>
<td>07 (11.6)</td>
<td>26 (43.3)</td>
<td>12 (20)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 6.10 and 6.11 are self-explanatory. They give an idea of the participant-learners awareness of the problems they faced and what did they do to overcome them.

 Participation in the decision-making process of the gram panchayat (village council) troubled the least number of the people, be they men, women, those living above poverty line or those living below poverty line. It must be noted that Gujarat has a good tradition of democracy at the grassroots and is among the states that has a vibrant panchayat system. Caste-based discrimination and lack of socio-economic opportunities bothered most of the participant learners. Though quite a few cited “other reasons,” none of them specified the “other reasons.

An interesting fact that emerges here is that more people living above poverty line reported caste-based discrimination than those living below poverty line. “Lack of economic opportunities” was reported almost in equal measure.

It is interesting to note that none turned to cooperative society to overcome their problem, while some formed/ became members of caste association or some other association(s). “Did nothing” category had more people (68 out of 120 or 56.6 per cent) than “did something (38 out of 120 or 31.6 per cent). This, despite the fact that Gujarat is considered a pioneer in cooperative movement, has livelier grassroots democratic set-up than many other Indian states and has the highest number of non-government organisations functioning among the states of India.
Table 6.12
How often do you vote in elections?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In all elections</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>13 (21.6)</td>
<td>35 (58.3)</td>
<td>12 (20)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>07 (11.6)</td>
<td>34 (56.6)</td>
<td>19 (31.6)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APL</td>
<td>16 (23.5)</td>
<td>39 (57.3)</td>
<td>13 (19.1)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>04 (7.6)</td>
<td>30 (57.6)</td>
<td>18 (34.6)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows their awareness of and participation in political process.

Better literacy skills helped LNrd-1 (F, 35, APL, supervisor in a diamond polishing unit) to better her personal economic condition. More concerned that she was with her daily bread, she did not bother much about political process. Her new skills led the owner of the diamond polishing unit where she worked to place greater trust in her. She was indeed able to return his trust as she was able to count and keep track of the precious stones better. Her newly acquired skills even helped her gain a promotion. She became a supervisor from a mere worker and that meant more financial rewards for her.

While some participant-learners, like LNrd-4 (F, 29, BPL, mother of three, housemaid) looked at the literacy classes as a long term “investment” that helped them know what their children were reading and gaining, to some learners the classes resulted in quick gains, too.

“(…) at the time of classes I learnt the importance of health and hygiene. This aspect is important for us as our main concern is cooking for parties (dinners and lunches) people throw at the time of social and other community affairs. You know a little negligence on the cleanliness part and the health of entire ‘samaj’ (community) is endangered. Literacy classes taught us the importance of maintaining cleanliness at the time of cooking:” LNrd-9 (M, 34, APL, a father of two, a cook).
Of course, these are the cases of individual gains. With almost all reporting personal gains, most of them on the economic front, it could be expected that the community, too, would gain somewhat. Individuals do contribute to the making of a community. But as the experiences of some of the learners bring out, community lost out on account of social structure that inhibited free movement of women folk. Take the case of LNrd-1 (F, 35, APL, supervisor in a diamond-cutting unit). While she benefited tremendously individually she felt that her “samaj” or the community could have gained much more if all women were allowed the personal liberty that her family gave her.

“No the community has not gained much from me being literate. We belong to Marwari community. Women are not allowed to come out much. I am lucky in that I am able to go out and work. If women are allowed to come out, encouraged to study as my family did in my case, the community will certainly benefit.” LNrd-1 (F, 35, APL, supervisor in a diamond cutting unit).

6.3.5. Importance of literacy: The importance the participants attached to the skill came to the fore as a corollary to the attempt to understand the participants’ understanding of “literacy.” It would not be naive to assume that if the participants — both learners and volunteer-teachers — attached importance to literacy, both would make greater attempt to impart and acquire the skill.

“(…) one should be able to read and write… can read bus number:” LNrd-14 (F, 44, a mother of three, a cooking assistant).

The learner does mention “… one should be able to read and write,” but almost in the same breath also mentions the naive sounding “… can read bus number.” A close scrutiny of the socio-economic circumstances in which this learner and indeed several others lived showed that the public transport system was the main means of communications. She, along with other members of her community, was dependent on
the public transport system to commute between home and their place of work that often used to be the venue of a marriage where they used to cook.

To be able to read bus route number meant reaching the place of work and coming back quickly, without having to depend on others, often strangers, to tell them the bus route.

Literacy was important to them as that would help them read the terms of a job or an assignment and help them avoid being cheated.

“(…) see, if one gets a job it is good enough. But that cannot be the criterion. Even if it does not lead to one landing a job, at least she cannot be cheated by others. She read a paper (document) and find out what is written there.

“I should know the existing rates of wages, and one should be able to count to check if one is getting the right amount:” LNrd-3 (F, 40, BPL, mother of three, cooking assistant).

And, as cited above, to LNrd-4 (F, 29, BPL, mother of three, housemaid), acquiring literacy meant better parenting in that she could keep track of her children’s studies:

“I am putting my skills to use mostly at home. Understanding what my children are studying, what they require, etc. Also, I am still making mattresses at home, something that I picked at that time.”

The importance that LNrd-3 (F, 40, BPL, a mother of three, a cooking assistant) attached to literacy is perhaps the most revealing in that she was feeling the pinch of relapsing into the realm of illiteracy.

“It (literacy) is important. I can say because I was illiterate, became literate and have become illiterate again. I realised the benefits of being
literate that is why I sent my daughter (LNrd-2) to the class. I will join classes if they were organised again.

Being part of the economy (as casual workers, contributing to the Gross Domestic Product) also makes them appreciate the importance of the literacy:

"Can one undermine the importance of literacy? It is important, very important if one wants to stay with times and live in this world of cut throat competition. That is why I made my children go to primary school. Since I can't afford to pay their fees in regular school, I have insisted that they attend the non-formal education classes.

"Though I don't remember the exact content of the books, I do remember that they were easy. I don't think that there is a need to change the books.

"What they must do is to repeat the classes:" LNrd-4 (F, 29, BPL, a mother of three, a housemaid).

6.3.6. (Inadequacy of the) Delivery system: The most important thematic deficiency of the traditional UNESCO approach to literacy has been its emphasis on imparting the ability to read and write instead of developing a skill that would open avenues to development, what people can and cannot do; whether they can live a healthy and long life, be able to earn for her/himself and family nutrition, apart from being able to read and write and communicate. Literacy has to lead to praxis that, in turn, could lead to individuals' domination of chance and circumstances. Universal primary education as an entitlement is enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Drawing analogy to Sen's\textsuperscript{16} (1989) "Entitlement Approach," literacy is an "entitlement" of the people that has to generate "capabilities."

Without any prejudice to their support for the literacy programmes and keenness to join them, it can be said that some "volunteer-teachers" did not join the programme of their own volition. They joined the programme only because they were bound to follow the advice of their superiors. Commitment of such "volunteer-teachers" to the cause of
literacy was always suspect and chances are that this affected the quality of literacy skill imparted. To repeat some of the quotes:

Our principal (TNa-2) told us that we were expected to teach people of this village how to read and write (TNa-1, F-53, APL, a mother of four children).

Where was the question of seeking our opinion or taking our consent? Just a ‘come-and-teach’ notice and we had two alternatives to choose from: either teach or quit the job. Now can you afford to give up a government job? (TNa-6, F-33, APL, a mother of two, lives in a joint family).

I didn’t teach, how could I?...there was no way. I had project to do. What was important to me: teaching those people or securing my degree (DCA or Diploma in Computer Application)? Obviously, my priority was the latter because my career depended on my DCA programme... how well I learnt programming and how well I did in my exams. My career, my life depended on it....

And so was the case with many of my classmates... they too did not teach. Well, almost (they taught) nothing (TSa-2, M, 30, APL, a father of two).

Expecting uniformity of thought of “participant learners and “volunteer-teachers” and “supervisors” in the way they saw each other will be unjustified. They came from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Yet the differences appear to be glaring enough. Little wonder the quality and the extent of literacy skills imparted have been questioned time and again.17

The differences in the way the participant-learners and the voluntary-teachers and supervisors saw the literacy programme are schematically depicted below:
### Participant learners

- **# Opportunity to learn**
  - a new skill, alternative to formal schooling/occasion to make up for lost opportunity
- **# Opportunity for social interaction**
- **# Enabling process** (could lead to job and hence better economic condition), to stay with times, to become self-reliant, overcome shame and embarrassment, leading to better parenting.
- **# Personal / social development**
- **# Beneficial for self/ community**
- **# Embarrassing** (due to wide age range: 15 to 45 despite the plan being meant for age group 15-35)
- **# Session for exchanging solution** to personal and social problems
- **# Sometime tiresome, sometime useful**
- **# Should be an on-going affair**
- **# Socialisation**

### Volunteer-teachers and supervisors

- **# Government duty/ Social responsibility**
  - moral responsibility, extension of volunteerism
- **# (Gandhian) tradition to uphold/ social interaction/ personal interest/ break from household chores/ humanitarian work/ God's work**
  - **# Conscientisation**
- **# Personal satisfaction (higher need gratification)**
- **# Beneficial for individual learners/ community/ nation**
- **# Condescending ("... they looked up to us for solution to their problems...")**
- **# Sometime forced duty, sometime change from the routine life, sometime burden, sometime satisfying**
- **# Should be an on-going affair, but should involve paid teachers, supervisors**
- **# Socialisation**
It is also worthwhile to note how participant-learners and volunteer-teachers and supervisors saw each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant-learners</th>
<th>Volunteer-teachers, Supervisors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>How they saw Volunteer-teachers and Supervisors</em></td>
<td><em>How they saw participant-learners</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Friend, Guide</td>
<td># Sometime friend, sometime student</td>
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<tr>
<td># Looking beyond being taught basics</td>
<td># To be taught the “basics” (simple literacy numeracy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Teachers</td>
<td># Student</td>
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<tr>
<td># Also solution providers</td>
<td># Means to understand the community and village better</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No gainsaying the fact that there is an urgent need to evolve a delivery system in which the difference in the ways the various players look at the literacy programme is minimal.

Lack of follow-up measures, such as post-literacy classes, is another area of concern. Most of the participants – learners, teachers and supervisors – felt the need for follow-up measures, particularly in the form of classes, even if the primers were easy.

“Though I don’t remember the exact content of the books, I do remember that they were easy. I don’t think that there is a need to change the books…. What they must do is to repeat the classes.” (LNrd 4)

“It is for them to decide. If they are sincere they should continue the programme, but it is a matter of their commitment.” (LNa-2, 60, BPL).
Of course there were suggestions on how to conduct the next round of classes and whom to send as teachers and what changes need to be made to primers.

“Oh! The programme was good. No two opinions. Perhaps it should be repeated. What do I do now. I have nothing to read.

"But when they plan the next round of classes, they should get the village teacher to teach us. This way, we can go him even after the classes have ended. If we have any problem, we can go to him directly instead of searching for someone who can help us.

“Also, the books should give us information on our agriculture. Which seed to use, which fertiliser to use. Above all these classes should be organized at regular interval.” (LNa-6, 55, APL)

"The programme was good. The ideals were noble. The government even did the right propaganda in the beginning. There might have been some lacunae in the implementation of the programme. One of them, I feel, was the programme was thrust on the teachers. Of course, our case was little different in the Vidyapith has a tradition of voluntarism. But other institutions from where volunteer-teachers were drawn from do not have the same environment. The planners should tae into account this fact when they plan another campaign in future.” (SS-1)

I think the campaign should be an on-going affair. It should be continued until the time the learners become confident of their new skills. Besides, I think the campaign should draw on locals as volunteers.

Educated youth, primary school teachers could be taken as volunteer-teachers. They could be given some incentive, like monetary rewards, part-time job in village panchayat (council) or career promotion as the case may be to keep them motivated, lessen school hours for them....
NGOs could be involved. The process has to go on and on. When I visited the village sometime ago, I found many of them had forgotten what they had learnt earlier. (SS 2)

Unemployed youths should be given this responsibility. They have surplus energy or rather their energy is untapped. To them it will be an outlet for their energy; to us it was a burden.

This was essentially a patchwork. The only way to ensure total literacy is to make sure that every child goes to school. Make schooling compulsory. There has to be universal primary education. (TN1).
Footnotes


12. Sabarmati Ashram, founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1917 after he came back from South Africa. He first established Kocharab Ashram in Ahmedabad (in 1915), but shifted to Sabarmati Ashram in July 1917. Its original name is Harijan Ashram, but founded that it is on the banks of the Sabarmati river, it popularly has come to be referred to as Sabarmati Ashram. Gandhi left the Ashram on his famous Dandi Kooch (Dandi March) in 1930, vowing to return to the hermitage only after India had gained “swaraj” (self-rule or freedom). Alas, he never went back to the hermitage. Either he did not get time to return to the hermitage because several parts of India were embroiled in a communal violence immediately before and after independence and Gandhi was busy traveling to the troubled regions, pacifying people, or independence that India gained on 15 August 1947 was not what Gandhi meant by “swaraj.”

13. For details on the Narmada (dam project), please refer to Chapter 3.

14. Details of adult education (campaign) have been given in Chapter 4.

