CHAPTER X

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The Education of women in India has been neglected since ages. This has mainly resulted in the low status of women who have remained largely illiterate. This is especially so of rural women who due to illiteracy and ignorance have remained superstitious and backward.

In Indian families, girls are expected to assume the responsibility of housework at a relatively early age. A girl is expected to help her mother in the household chores as well as in looking after younger siblings. During a family crisis, such as the illness of the mother or even a relative, the first victims are often girls, because the partial burden of housework then falls entirely on the daughter. She is compelled to discontinue her studies.

The condition is more alarming in rural areas. The Indian village society is strongly patriarchal and social relationships are influenced and regulated by male members and the caste system. Religious attitudes, customs, traditions, early marriage and the authority of the father may be cited as factors responsible for the neglect of female education in rural areas. This is directly responsible for the low female literacy in rural areas.
After independence, the Government of India has taken several measures to increase the level of literacy of women, both in rural and urban areas. It is here that the Adult Education Programmes have come in useful, especially due to emphasis in encouraging adult education in rural areas. Over a period of time the AEP has changed its "Social education" approach of the pre-independence period, to the total-literacy, post-literacy and special campaigns after Independence.

This study has made an attempt to evaluate the impact of the special campaigns on the adult rural female with respect to not only functional literacy, but also its repercussions on the Small Family Norm, Maternal and Child Health and Health and Hygiene. These are aspects which directly determine the quality of life of the adult rural female, and inturn can bring about not only the betterment of rural society to some extent but can also help the rural women to be more rational in nature, cultivate the ability to take decisions, be aware of exploitation and attempt to enhance their social status.

In the region under study many of the factors cited above have conspired to keep the adult rural females illiterate. Hence the AEP initiated in this region has made an impact in dispelling illiteracy to a very great extent. However this study shows that the success in the spread of adult literacy is not even in all regions of the area under study which is quite natural due to local circumstances and social factors. Bearing this in mind, this study has made an
attempt to identify some of those factors which have helped in the success in the spreading of literacy in rural areas and also generally made an attempt to identify some of the factors which have come in its success, such as the lacunae in the implementation of the programme, lack of personnel, religious and traditional factors etc.

The age of the respondent is an important factor in the success of the programme, for it directly relates to use of memory, retention of the instructions and the general enthusiasm and interest of the participant. The data shows that in the rural areas more respondents from the younger age groups have enrolled for the AEP, whereas the older age group of women had stayed away, either due to inhibitions, preoccupation with family responsibilities or due to other occupational chores such as tending to cattle, sowing and harvesting operations etc. Hence, a large group of women of above 30 years who form an important component of the target group had remained elusive.

In rural society, not only the caste, but the religion also plays an important role in the social and cultural life of the people. Religion dominates through not only the customs and traditions but regulates the daily life of the people as it helps to form their attitude and opinions. In this respect, Hinduism and Veershaivism which are the predominant local sects to which a majority of the respondents profess and Jainism are more progressive. Though traditionally respondents from these religious background had been kept away from the fruits of education, yet when the AEP were introduced in the region, a large
number of Hindu and Jain respondents immediately enrolled themselves to avail the benefits. However, the study reveals that this is not the case of the village dominated by Muslims. Respondents from Islamic religious backgrounds have faced many hurdles due to lack of encouragement from the men folk. The reintroduction of the Purdah system and strict adherence to fundamentalistic tenets of their religion have once again conspired to keep Muslim women respondents in bondage. This researcher in fact, found it extremely difficult to even approach Muslim respondents, despite being a woman, unless she took recourse to some local help from more progressive minded village folk. Thus AEP has not succeeded in penetrating these religious taboos. Muslim women have remained largely beyond the reach of AEP.

Similarly the Caste System has played an important role in rural areas all over India. The upper castes have tended to acquire education since they have been able to afford to send their sons to schools in nearby towns, but even upper caste girls have tended to drop out of schools after puberty. In many villages schools are too far away. Further, bad roads which lead to flood during the extended monsoon period also act as a disincentive for girls. Added to these the early age of marriage, traditional hostility towards girls acquiring higher education etc, act as disincentives. It was recently reported in the newspapers (Deccan Herrald 24 Aug 1997) that a brilliant girl near Doddaballapur in Southern Karnataka had acid thrown on her face by local youths because she
preferred not to take their advise to discontinue her education after completing her pre-university, but wanted to go to college.

In the region under study, the largest number of respondents are from the Lower Caste Hindus (74.2 percent) but progressively decline in the Middle Caste Hindus (49.09 percent) and Upper Caste Hindus (47.2 percent). The study shows that the AEP has been successful in covering the LCH who are illiterate masses and who had been traditionally kept away from the perview of education. These groups have enthusiastically taken to adult literacy. However, the percentage of women from the MCH and UCH are much lower.

As cited earlier, one of the important stages in a girl’s life is marriage and most rural girls are married off at very young ages. A married girl immediately drops out of school and attends to household chores. However this study reveals that AEP has been successful in covering the target group of adult married women. The data shows that 87 percent of the respondents were married and only 13 percent were unmarried. Thus these respondents were receptive to important components of adult education such as Small Family Norm, Maternal and Child Health, Health and Hygiene etc, which they can introduce into their family life.

The study also attempts to cast light on the birth order of the respondent, as it has a bearing on her participation in the AEP. The Highest percentage of learners were found to be the Second Child in the family, followed by the respondents who were the Fourth Child. The percentage of
non-learners was highest when the respondent was born after four siblings, followed by the group in which the respondent was the First Child. The results indicated that when the respondent belonged to the two extreme groups, that is either as the First Child or when she was beyond the Fourth Child, the enrollment under AEP was low. This could be because in the former group the eldest girl child was often assigned the responsibility of looking after the younger siblings and attending to household chores while the later, did not care to learn as there did not seem to be any encouragement from elders.

It is interesting to observe from this study that there were more number of learners (53%) from joint families as compared to learners from nuclear families (47%). This may be because in a joint family, the presence of elder female relatives provided the respondents more time to attend to AEP classes instead of attending to household work. In nuclear families, all the work had to be attended to by the respondent herself, thereby, she had relatively less time and opportunities to attend AEP classes. Further, it is generally believed that the small size of the family gives more time for other activities for a woman. But this is not so with respect to participation in AEP. It was observed that a high percentage (57%) of learners were from families with less than 5 members. Hence, it was observed that the respondents in large families could share the burden of household work with other members of the family and hence, were able to attend the Adult Education Programmes.
The economic condition of a family in rural areas is often determined by the size of land holdings. The study indicated that the economic status of landed categories small, medium and large farmers had the proportion of learners from 33 percent to 44 percent and to a high of 70 percent. This could be because of the issue of involvement of prestige, among the higher economic groups who attempt to remain above the lower classes even in aspects like AEP. However, the proportion of learners among landless labourers was about 51 percent which threw light that more and more women from the lowest economic status came out and liked to participate with AEP.

The income of the family from all sources has also been considered to determine the economic status of the respondents. Often data regarding income is not reliable but the researcher has made a genuine effort to determine the income through various methods of cross checking.

The study shows that a large percentage of the respondents hail from higher income group of more than Rs. 36,000 per annum.

The AEP has some important social components which are aimed at not only improving the literacy rate but are also aimed at dispelling ignorance, superstition and traditional customs which can bring about allround socio-economic improvement of the adult rural females. These programmes are aimed at improving the health status of the women, encourage the Small Family Norm and Maternal and Child Health Services. Further, they improve the condition of the family and strengthen the health of women in the child bearing
age. They also control communicable diseases which are rampant in rural areas due to lack of knowledge on maintaining proper levels of health and hygiene. An important aspect of this study has been collecting and analysing data on these aspects of the AEP and how far the respondents have been able to have an awareness towards these issues or to what extent they have been able to successfully incorporate these ideas into their social life.

The data reveal that a significantly large number of respondents attending AEP classes have been able to appreciate the importance of the Small Family Norm and the Maternal and Child Health Services. Whereas the non-learners were unable to appreciate the importance of the SFN and MCH. This is reiterated by the values of the chi-square test, t-test and F-test.

The AEP also made special attempts to educate the rural illiterates about matters concerning Health and Hygiene such as cleanliness, sanitation, preservation of food and water, the ill effects of smoking and alcoholism, protection of environment and the like. The data reveal that a significantly large number of respondents attending the AEP have been able to appreciate the importance of maintaining good health and proper hygiene whereas the non-learners were unable to appreciate the importance of Health and Hygiene concepts. This is established by the values of the chi-square test, t-test and F-test.

The AEP has also been able to create social awareness, economic awareness, legal awareness and political awareness apart from creating health
awareness in the adult rural female literates. The data reveal a high significance with respect to all the above factors. This is further reiterated by the value of the chi-square test.

Further, the findings of the study also reveal that there is significant status improvement with respect to learners due to their participation in AEP.

In conclusion it may be said that the AEP has had a positive impact in ushering change in the attitude of adult rural female literates. It has generally succeeded in improving their overall condition. Consequently this generally helped to create awareness towards rural female empowerment.