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ADULT EDUCATION: A KEY ELEMENT FOR THE TRIBAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

DR. TADEPALLI DORA BABU
ASST. PROFESSOR
GROUP OF ADULT EDUCATION
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI

ABSTRACT

The programs of adult education are important for growth and development of any nation, particularly for developing countries like India. It is considered to be the timely intervention, to tackle present day socio, economic problems that arise. The government of India has taken many steps in this direction of strengthening participation of tribal groups in the nation's development. Adult education programs were implemented effectively and yielded desired outcomes. The present qualitative descriptive study elucidates the effectiveness and impact of these programs, which has brought on changes in the life styles of tribal women and how far it contributed to enhancement of human development. It found that there is a positive impact, but impact varies from one variable to another like age, regularity of participation, marital status etc, on social, cultural, health and family planning, economic, and participation in developmental activities. The study suggests that adult education centres need to be strengthened for further positive changes in lifestyle, in order to ultimately lead to enhancement of Human Development Index. The main objective of this paper is to elucidate the importance of tribal women's participation in the main stream of national development, who were excluded till recently. It explores how far the program is useful to tribal women, to investigate perceptions of educators, village elders and community leaders about changes that occurred, to investigate what are the major changes that occurred among tribal women after being educated, whether adult education programs are having any impact on their social awareness, cultural understanding/concerns, health, economic independence, and participation in developmental activities and aspects of tribal women, to study impact levels between different age groups of tribal women.

KEYWORDS

adult education, tribal women empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Daniel Learner (1962, p.55)¹ believed that education is an important agent for bringing about modernization to a particular society. He further said that modernization is essentially an educational process, which opens the doors to modernization. Education provides one of the most important channels of transition from traditional to modern society. Literacy is, therefore, both the index and agent to modernization. Education transmits the culture of one generation to another. The rising generation has not only to be conveyed the activities and experiences of the past generation and asked to make necessary changes in those activities and experiences to meet the new situations as which it will match. An integration of the old must take place with the new ones. The communities like in the present, on the past and for the future. This means, activities and experiences in the present have to be built on the past and the present will guide the activities of the future. Education is a continuous reorganization and integration of activities and experiences. According to Moore (1968, p.164)² social change is consequence and manifestation of such structures embodied in names, values, cultural products and symbol. In this point of view, any alteration to be socially significant, has to be accepted by the majority of the people and has to be assimilated or integrated in the society. Society exists only as a time sequence. According to the Education Commission³ of 1964-66, a major objective of education is to help bring about social change. It maintains that if this change on a grand scale is to be achieved without violent revolution there is one and only one instrument that can be used is 'Education'. Literacy and education play an important role in the development of the individual and society. Education has become basic need today. Knowledge liberates us from ignorance. Education enables people to think critically, rationally, and scientifically. Illiteracy is the source of individual helplessness in several contexts. Selfish and clever people take advantage of others illiteracy. Illiterates become easy prey for moneylenders and other people. Education plays an important role in social and economic development of a country. It is the basic requirement for every individual, because education leads to his balanced and all-round development. It not only equips an individual but also instills in him/her values of humanism, democracy, socialism and national integration.

With the successful implementation of adult education programs in several districts in India, the situation is fast emerging whereby thousands of non-literates are acquiring literary skills and joining the class of neo-literates year after year. Similarly the literacy campaigns have resulted in a positive change in attitude among the learners and have enabled them to play a crucial role for their own development and for the development of the country. There are also tremendous changes in science and technology as well as in social practices across India. Education is a forceful instrument to change the values and attitudes of the people and to create in them the urge of the necessary motivation to achieve class ascendancy and social mobility. It can cut down the thick roots of traditions, superstitions, ignorance, backwardness, etc. It can help people in knowing their weakness or gaps of knowledge. The goal of adult education is to establish a non-violent and non-exploitative social and economic order. Education and human resource development will play a key role in the 21st century⁴. Adult education is an indispensable component of the strategy of human resource development and goal of creating a learning society. Achievement of basic literacy is not an end in itself. It is the entry point to the world of information technology. In any society, there is direct relationship or link between education and human development. Very fact is that when Human Development Index of any country is calculated education and literacy levels of that particular country play a crucial role in estimating Human Development Index (HDI). After all, the aim of education, whether it is formal, informal or non-formal, is to modify human behavior. This modification of human behavior can be achieved by providing adequate information, knowledge, attitude, and skills, which a particular society requires. Education is an important agent for bringing about modernization to a particular society. Literacy is, therefore, both indicator and agent of modernization. Education transmits culture from one generation to another, and adult education enhances transmission⁵.

Social change is a consequence and manifestation of such structures embodied in names, values, cultural products and symbols. In this point of view, any alteration to be socially significant, has to be accepted by majority of people and has to be assimilated or integrated into society. According to the Education Commission (India) of 1964-66, a major objective of education is to help bring about social change. It maintains that if this change on a grand scale is to be achieved without violent revolution there is one and only one instrument that can be used and that is 'Education'. Literacy and education play an important role in development of individual and society. Education has become a basic need today. Knowledge liberates us from ignorance. Education enables people to think critically, rationally, and scientifically. Illiteracy is source of individual helplessness in several contexts. Selfish and clever people take advantage of others illiteracy. Illiterates become easy prey for moneylenders and other people.

Education also plays an important role in social and economic development of a country. It is basic requirement for every individual, because education leads to his/her balanced and all-round development. However, it not only equips an individual but also instills in him values of humanism, democracy, socialism and national integration. But in India, progress in literacy rate is not very much encouraging, mainly due to an unabated population growth and massive dropouts in first four years of elementary schooling? And many literacy programs, but unfortunately these programs did not have the expected impact because of lack of motivation and high rate of dropouts from literacy classes. Latest literacy program, known as Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), was launched with an entirely new approach in, 1989 to achieve objectives of National Literacy Mission (NLM)⁶.

According to 2001 Census, Tribal groups constitute 9.58% of total population in country⁷. They are the earliest inhabitants of India, they have a distinct culture due to various historical and other reasons. Since forests have been major abode of tribal people they have developed emotive attachment towards forests. It is because of relative physical isolation from the mainstream for generations that they have nurtured their own way of life depending on their ecology. Tribal communities are differentiated from non-tribals as their social affairs are to a large extent guided by mutual obligations and moral bindings. Their institutions and traditions are based on cooperation and are community oriented. Physical isolation of tribals from non-tribal societies to some extent has also resulted in high incidence of illiteracy, ignorance and poverty among them. Over a period of time, some changes come into being in life styles of tribals. There are 38 tribal communities existing in Andhra Pradesh⁸. There is need to pay specific attention to their needs and lifestyles so that these tribal communities may be brought into the development process of the nation. Five-Year plans have given some importance to this. Development plans for tribals is to serve as an instrument to improve not only quality of their life but also to bring them into national mainstream. To bring this positive and progressive change, the Government of India has taken various steps and among those initiatives adult education is one. It is argued that women are best agents for social change and development.

ADULT EDUCATION FOR TRIBAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women constitute an important part of human resources of a country. For a developing country like India the contribution of women is as indispensable as that of men. It is widely recognized that the success of national development very much depends upon the active and useful participation of women in all developmental programs. Nearly, half of India's population comprises women (933 females per 1000 males)⁹. Because of inadequate expansion of education among women particularly in the tribal communities, they feel themselves unable to shoulder their responsibilities in different walks of life. In general the position of women in our country is not a happy one as most of them are illiterate, and are ignorant of political, legal, social, and economic issues. We in India have accelerated the pace of education's expansion after independence, but due to rapid increase in population and for several other reasons – social, economic and political, we have not been able to extend the fruits of education to the entire population of the country. Hence the huge number of illiterates, among whom the number of women is much higher than men. For full development of human resources, for improvement of our homes and for moulding character of children during most impressionable years of infancy, education of women is of greater importance than that of men. Keeping in view these points, Government of India has decided to impart education to women on priority basis, so as to equip them in performing their duties and for shouldering heavy responsibilities at home as well as outside. Eradication of illiteracy has been one of the major concerns of the Government of India since Independence. Need for a literate population and universal education for all children in age group of 6-14 years was recognized as a crucial input for nation building and was given consideration in constitution as well as in successive five year plans. A number of significant programs like, Social Education, *Gramashikshan Mohim*, Farmer's Functional Literacy Project, Non-Formal Education, Functional Literacy for Adult Women, and Rural Functional Literacy Project have been taken up to eradicate illiteracy among adults.

The women are an integrating force in society and are pivot around whom family life revolves. A literate woman can make family and society more cultured. In fact social development in any country depends on awakening and co-operation of women who form half and sometimes more than half of population of the country. When women are backward society is backward, when they are static society is also static¹⁰.

The Census Report of India (2001) has designated that 1991-2001 as "Decade of Literacy" mainly due to significant increase in literacy rates as compared to previous decades. Literacy rate rose from 52.61 to 64.84 per cent during the period, making for the first time since independence. A remarkable decline in number of illiterates by 31.9 million and an increase in number of literate by 207.44 million, which reflected an overall increase of 12.63%, the fastest decadal growth ever, this was the highest rate since independence. There was a significant increase in 14.87 per cent in female literacy as against that of 11.72 per cent among males. It has helped in reducing to some extent gender disparity.

Literacy is one of the most important basis for development. Literacy enhances the participation in developmental programs, leads to successful implementation. Inspired by success story of 'Ernakulam', hundreds of districts in country adopted the model of Total Literacy Campaigns (TLC) and conducted Post Literacy Program (PLP). Total Literacy Campaign was implemented in Andhra Pradesh by name *Akshra Kiranam*. In Andhra Pradesh, from among 140 lakhs of illiterates identified in age group of 15-35 years by March 1998, 70 lakhs have been made literates through Total Literacy Campaigns and Post Literacy Campaigns. Mahabubnagar district is one of backward districts of Andhra Pradesh. Tribal literacy rate is lowest in Andhra Pradesh particularly in Mahabubnagar district, as compared to all other districts in Andhra Pradesh. *Akshra kiranam* was launched in Mahabubnagar District, on 16th June 1996, as "Akshara kiranam" intending to make 6,56,105 literates in age group of 15-35 years. Before introducing *Akshara kiranam* program in Mahabubnagar district, total literacy was 29.58 per cent. After execution of *Akshara kiranam program* literacy rate was found 34.35 per cent, i.e., on the whole there is an increase of a mere 4.77 per cent which can be attributed that *Aksharakiranam* program which has an impact on life style of women¹¹.

SAMPLE AND METHOD

Mahabubnagar district in *Telangana* region, is the most backward district in all aspects particularly in respect of literacy. Male and female literacy percentage is 29.58 and 18.03 per cent respectively. In this district, many people are agricultural laborers and *coolies*. Due to illiteracy majority of women continue to be ignorant and are exploited in society. The Government of Andhra Pradesh and district authorities have taken much interest and put efforts to increase literacy rate. Hence, there was a lot of improvement in literacy scenario of Mahabubnagar district. *Akshra kiranam* (Total Literacy Campaign) was held very effectively in this district and there is a lot of improvement¹². The study was limited to adult education centres in Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh in India, to tribal women who were attending during period 1998 to 2001, but results or findings are not to be generalized to other communities. For a study of this problem as mentioned earlier "The impact of Adult Educational Programs on lifestyle of tribal women in Andhra Pradesh, India: An analytical study and critical evaluation" suitable method is descriptive qualitative study. In this type of study focus is on prevailing conditions. It deals with analysis, interpretation of data which have been gathered (collected) for a specific purpose for undertaking and solution of significant problem more empirically¹³. To carry out the study, for collection of data, for testing hypothesis, and for arriving at certain conclusions three tools were used, i.e. questionnaires, observations and interviews, where triangulation is strength for qualitative study. Sample for this study consisted of female learners who enrolled in adult education centres in age group between 15 – 35 years from tribal community in Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. Sample is selected from population based on rate of ST community population. There are 64 revenue mandals in Mahabubnagar district. Among these 64 mandals due to vastness of study, only four revenue mandals were taken as sample mandals Viz., 1. Atchampeta, 2. Uppunthala, 3. Vangooru and 4. Telkapally, based on highest tribal population. These four mandals are highly concentrated with tribal population. In these four mandals adult education centres were selected randomly where programs implemented. Total 300 adult learners, 100 adult educators and 100 village elders / community leaders were selected for investigation.

According to data, majority (77%) of learners said that there is a positive impact on them due to their participation in adult education program. Eighty six per cent of learners responded saying that they are able to read. It has helped them to read names on busses, places. And other forms. They have learned basic additions and subtractions. 80% of learners said that they are approaching Government officials if they have any problem. Large group (90%) of them said that they have realized importance of education and among married learners 83% of them said that they are sending their children to school at right age. Ninety nine per cent of learners said that they are well aware of current events taking place around them. It is very interesting to note that they are not practicing superstitious beliefs after attending adult education program. They have learned some of facts, which are useful to them. Eighty nine per cent of learners responded saying that they are having good practices in their religious ceremonies. When it comes to dress pattern, only fifty five per cent of them said that there was a change taken place in their dress pattern after attending adult education program. Ninety eight per cent of learners said that they are taking care of their health. 92 % of them said that they are taking nutritious and balanced food. Among married learners, 60% of them said that they are aware of family planning methods and they are practicing. Eighty four per cent of learners said that they have learned to keep surroundings clean. Seventy two per cent of learners said that they came to know hazards of alcoholism and they are in favour of prohibition. Seventy nine per cent of learners, who are eligible for voting, said that they are utilizing their right to vote in elections. Eighty four per cent of learners said that they are taking part in society development activities like

Janmabhoomi. Eighty per cent of learners said that they have become members in *Mahila mandali (Mahalakshmi)* groups. Sixty three per cent of learners said that they have learned money saving procedures and they said that they are practicing¹⁴.

Data collected pertaining to 100 adult educators, who were involved actively in teaching process through questionnaires, deals with their perceptions and observations about adult learners who were attending adult education centres and impact of adult education program on life style of tribal women. In a nutshell, how tribal people are changed due to their participation in adult education program, in general about social, self development, cultural aspects, health aspects, economic aspects and participation in developmental activities, etc. was also highlighted. Before going further it is appropriate to draw attention towards millennium development goals. These goals were framed according to the Nations Millennium Declaration of UN in 2000, set to be achieved by the year 2015. They arise from a realization that there will be no development without security, and no security without development, and neither possible without respect for human rights. Basically there will be not social security as along as there is no social inclusion with given situation a country like ours where social exclusion prevailed, that suppressed the people of lower strata for many years.

SOCIAL AWARENESS ASPECT

Keeping the above background in view, all respondents were categorized into three age groups as 15 -19 Years, 20 – 29 Years, and 30 – 35 Years, and social awareness aspect is divided in to three sub groups as high impact, moderate impact, and low impact based on quartile values. Among learners who are in between 15 – 19 years of age, very few (9.4%) of them reported that they have acquired high impact, more than half (57.6%) of them said that they have acquired moderate impact in their social awareness aspect, where as one third (32.9%) of them said that, they had low impact in their social awareness levels because of adult education program. In second group 20 – 29 years of age, nearly one fourth (24.6%) of them said that they have acquired high impact, but in this group interestingly more than half (59.4%) of them said that they have acquired moderate impact, only very few of them said that they have acquired low impact on their social awareness levels. In third group, nearly half of them (49.4%) said that they have acquired high impact and almost same number of learners (48.1%) reported that they have acquired moderate impact where as very few learners (2.6%) said that they have acquired very less impact. It is clear indication that age of learners is playing a major role in social awareness levels of learners.

Data also shows that, there is a variation in social awareness levels of learners who attended program based on marital status. It indicates that marital status of learner plays a major role in learning process and ultimately learning out comes. It shows that, among unmarried learners very few (5.4%) of them says that they have high impact and more than half (53%) of them said that there is moderate impact where as 41.7% of them said that there is low impact on their social awareness levels. When it comes to second group, who are married learners one third of them (32.6%) of them said there is high impact, more than half (59.8%) of them said that there is moderate impact and very few (7.6%) of them said that there is low impact, learners who attend program regularly 24% of them said that there is high impact, more than half (59.5%) of them said that there is moderate impact and very few (16.5%) of them said that there is low impact. When it comes to regular learners only 4% of them said that there is high impact and half of them (49%) said that there is moderate impact where as 47% of them said that there is low impact¹⁵.

CULTURAL ASPECT

In any community or tribe, cultural aspects play a major role in their lives. But education is one component, which can bring desired changes in cultural aspects of any community⁷. Data, clearly indicates that among 15-19 years age group of learners 49.4% of them said they have acquired high impact, nearly 43.5% of them said they have acquired moderate impact 7.1% of said that adult education program created low impact, on their cultural aspects. Among learners who belong to 20-29 years, 18.8% of them said there is high impact, and 65.9% of them said there is moderate impact where as 15.2% of them said that there is low impact. Among 30-35 years age group learners 9.1% of them said that there is high impact and, 72.7% of them said there moderate impact and 18.2% of them said there is low impact on their cultural aspects.

The learner's performance and changes in cultural values were discussed in relation to marital status of learner. Culture is one of major components of society and life style. Education brings desired qualities in culture. Through education only we can bring change or transformation in culture. In this process of transformation of culture, marital status of individual plays a major role. Very few (10.7%) of them said that there is high impact, where as majority (70.2%) of them said that there is moderate impact and 19% of unmarried learners said that there is low impact. In second group who are married learners, 43.2% of them said that there is high impact, and half (50%) of them said that there is moderate impact where as very few (6.8%) of them said that there is low impact. above statements prove that, there is a significant role played by marital status of learner. However, along with other factors, marital status of learner is also important. Based on about findings it is concluded that there is influence of marital cultural values they have acquired at centres.

The learners nature of attendance, whether regular are irregular and how it effected learning process, was studied. Data shows that those learners who attend classes regularly have acquired high impact and who are attending program irregularly have acquired low impact. Data shows that among irregular learners, 30% of them have acquired high impact and 60% of them have acquired moderate impact where as 10% of them have acquired low impact. Among regular learners 15% of them said that there is high impact and, 64% of them said there is moderate impact and 21% of them said that there is low impact¹⁶.

HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING ASPECT

The data shows that tribal women, who were attending programs, were much benefited and shows that different age group of learners and their learning out comes are vary. It shows that it is adult education, not age of learner, which brought this impact.

Among learners who are in between 15-19 years (9.4%) of them said there is high impact, majority (81.1%) of them said that there is moderate impact where as very few (9.4%) of them said there is low impact. Among learners who belongs to 20-29 years, very few (13.8%) of them said that there is high impact and more than half (53.6%) of them said that there is moderate impact where as one third (32.6%) of them said that there is low impact. Among learners who are in between 30-35 years of age, only 5.2% of them said that they have acquired high impact and 42.9% of them said there is moderate impact and more than half (51.9%) of them said that there is low impact.

Under health aspect, health practices of individual learner and health practices at community level and family planning measures were studied and was found from analysis that marital status of learner plays a role in health practices of learner. Program aimed at well being of individuals as well as society. In this process, along with literacy program health awareness was also taught. At adult education centre, learning out comes levels were different among married and unmarried learners. That data analysis presents following facts, among unmarried learners, only 11.3% of them said that they have acquired high impact 42.9% of them said that they have acquired moderate impact and 45.8% of learners said that they have acquired low impact. Among married learners, 9.1% of them said they have high impact, where as majority of them (78.8%) of them said that there is moderate impact and 12.5% of them said that they have acquired low impact. These statements show that there is relation ship between marital status of learner and health practices they have acquired or its impact on their lifestyle. It also shows that there is a significant difference in learning out comes of learners in relation to their marital status.

According to data, those who are attending irregularly 12% of them said that there is high impact and 62% of them have acquired moderate impact where as 26% of them have acquired low impact. Among regular learners, only 7% of them said that they have acquired high impact and more than half (52%) of them said that they have acquired moderate impact, 41% of them said they have acquired low impact¹⁷.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The data shows that, among learners between 15-19 years of age majority (75.3%) of them said that there is high impact, 18.8% of them said there is moderate impact, but very few (5.9%) of them said there is low impact. Among 20-29 years age group of learners, 31.9% of them said there is high impact, and 34.8% of them said there is moderate impact and one third (33.3%) of them said there is low impact. Among 30-35 years age group of learners very few of them (14.3%) said that there is high impact and 41.6% of them said there is moderate impact and 44.2% of them said there is low impact.

Age of learner played a vital role in learning process of adults. Economic status is one of aspects, which plays an important role in individual's life or in society development. When an individual is financially sound then only, we say that particular individuals economic status is good. Along with literacy program, adult education program aimed at economic development of individual particularly for women through inculcating concepts like Mahalakshmi group, self help groups, DWACRA, etc., projects. It is found from data analysis that impact of adult education program on economic aspects of tribal women was very high. Though it differed from individual to individual, in relation to age or marital status, it is showing that there is an impact. data presented following facts. Among unmarried learners, 16.7% of them said that there is high impact and 39.3% of them said that there is moderate impact where as nearly half (44%) of them said that there is low impact. Among unmarried learners, majority (68.9%) of them said that there is high impact 22.7% of them said there is moderate impact where as very few (8.3%) of them said that there is low impact.

Among irregular learners 19.5% of them said that there is low impact and nearly one third of them said that there is moderate impact and almost half (49.5%) of them said that there is high impact. Among regular attendance, 46% of them said that there is low impact, more than one third said that there is moderate impact and 20% of them said that there is high impact. Above findings show that there is a relationship between regularity in attendance and improvement in economic status of learner. It also shows that there is significant difference in impact levels of economic growth of learner¹⁸.

PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

In this aspect, data indicates that, there is a variation between learning out come and age of learner. Different age groups have said that there is an impact, but impact levels were varying. Among learners who are in between 15-19 years age more than half (62.4%) of them said that is high impact one third (34.1%) of them said that there is moderate impact and, 3.5% of them said there is low impact. In second group of learners, 28.3% of them said that is high impact and 36.2% of them said there is moderate impact where as 35.5% of them said that there is low impact. In third group, who are in between 30-35 year of age only few (3.9%) of them said that there high impact and 42.9% of them said that there is moderate impact where as more than half (53.2%) of them said there is low impact.

It was general assumption that married women will not participate. But present scenario is changed everywhere, including, tribal *thandas* in Mahabubnagar District. Women are taking active part in elections, policy making and in business and agricultural sectors. Those misconceptions were varnished and new approaches and attitudes were created among tribal women, through adult education program. In pursuance of finding out impact of program on life style, study was focused in learner. Among unmarried learners very few (9.5%) of them said that there is high impact and 40.5% of them said that there is moderate impact and half (50%) of them said that there is low impact. Among married learners, majority of them (59.8%) said that there is high impact one third (33.4%) of them said that there is moderate impact and very few (6.8%) of them said there is low impact.

The data indicated that there is a relationship between nature of attendance and impact on participation. Those learners who are attending regularly made a positive impact that irregular learners. Among regular attending learners, 40% of them said there is high impact and more than one third (36%) of them said that there is moderate impact and 24% of them said there is low impact. Among irregularly attending learners only very few of (0.5%) of them said that there is high impact. 40% of them said that there is moderate impact and 45% of them said that there is low impact¹⁹.

CONCLUSION

Along with primary, secondary and higher education, for enhancing lifestyle of tribal women and social inclusion in national main stream, adult education also plays a pivotal role. In a way adult education is contributing to social inclusion by developing knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic and national values, there by helping to develop capacity to get rid of the clutches of social evils that used to keep them under bondage generation after generation. In conclusion, the study reemphasizes that literacy is the fountain of human, social, and cultural capitals. It is the wealth of nation in respect of economic, political and social transformation. Adult education program has resulted in a positive change in attitude, a new confidence among the learners to upgrade their skills and adopt it for individual development, and eventually for social action. The enthusiasm and confidence generated among learners who have successfully completed the literacy programs establishes the fact that there is an immense impact of adult education on the lifestyle of tribal women. As adult education aims at social reconstruction, it can be concluded that adult education is a key element for Tribal Women's empowerment in the light of social inclusion.

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