1

GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL SCENARIO ON LITERACY

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Learning Objectives

After studying this unit, you are expected to be able to

- ❖ Explain the concept of literacy and its importance at the global, regional and national levels
- ❖ Explain the need for literacy
- ❖ Identify the various forms and types of literacy
- ❖ Apply various approaches to implement adult literacy programmes.
- ❖ Develop your own understanding of issues related to literacy.

1.1 Introduction

Unit 1 provides the learner with an overview of the state of literacy world wide. It discusses the vision and need for literacy especially in contemporary knowledge societies and the necessity of working for literacy for one's well-being. It guides you to develop your own definition of literacy, describe different forms of literacy, and to apply your understanding of adult literacy learning to global, regional and national scenarios.

1.2 Global Scenario

Before we start our overview of global scenario on literacy, it is essential to build a perspective on literacy discourse. In the field of literacy, we are much used to dividing the world into illiterates and literates. Generally we tend to follow the global pattern of perceiving in society such binary oppositions as between underdeveloped and developed, between primitive and modern. Just as there are worldwide programs to remove underdevelopment and thereby usher in modern age so are there many plans to end illiteracy. In this sense for most of us the distinction between illiteracy and literacy is the same as between primitive and modern or between underdeveloped and developed.

This perception makes universal literacy as a first condition for development. Such a view of literacy begs questions like 'How does one define literacy? Do underdeveloped countries wait till they achieve universal literacy before they can engage in development activities? Why have traditional adult literacy learning initiatives not brought in any significant way either universal literacy or enabled participants to acquire new skills to improve their well-being? These are some difficult questions that we need to consider as we construct our perspective on literacy. For academic debate on this subject you may like to go through Box 1.1.

Box 1.1 Debate on Literacy

In academia, social scientists like Goody (1977) and Olson (1977) found a link between cognitive abilities and learning to be literate and then they pointed out how through times immemorial literacy has been important for the way a society works. Global concerns with literacy campaigns also reflect the popular assumption about utmost importance of literacy for functioning of a society. Though we generally associate the development of writing with main cognitive advances in human history, new researches in the field of adult learning belie the veracity of link between cognition and literacy. For example Scribner and Cole (1978), Street (1984), Finnegan (1988) and Maddox (2004) have challenged the thesis of a link between literacy and cognition. They argue that there are no empirical or theoretical grounds to assume that literacy and cognition are necessarily linked with each other. Though Farrell (1977: 451) argued that "the cognitive restructuring caused by reading and writing develop the higher reasoning processes involved in extended abstract thinking", there is, however, hardly any evidence to prove that writing promotes general mental abilities, or literates possess any special language integration skills. Such ideas as promoted by Goody, Olson and Farrell were in the past a basis for planning literacy programs but in contemporary conditions, differences between literates and non-literates do not follow the assumptions of the metaphor of a "great divide" between literates and illiterates.

The results of the tests Scribner and Cole (1977: 13-17) carried out in three areas of communicative skills, memory and language analysis during their study of Vai peoples of Liberia made clear that 'specific practices promote specific skills' and that is why the claims of literacy thesis are not tenable. In the light of the hold of cognition thesis of literacy and its sway over policy makers, the doubt arose in mind about literacy being over-rated.

Scribner and Cole's finding (that the distinction between illiteracy and literacy may not

be appropriate under conditions when reading and writing of a text is not the sole source of information and knowledge) is tenable because today people receive information and knowledge from innumerable sources, including those that do not require the ability to read and write. In view of the sophistication of "oral" culture in India (also see Finnegan 1999), it is not surprising to find the entire corpus of Vedic literature surviving for centuries without being written up by its creators. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Illiteracy is a curse in our country." At the same time he went on to proclaim, "Literacy in itself is no education." For Gandhi, "Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning." He elaborated that "Literacy must be one of the many means for intellectual development, but we have had in the past the intellectual giants who were illiterate." Gandhi espoused a well-integrated concept of cultural literacy.

It is important that we do not ignore the findings of new researches while re-formulating our plans for literacy on the ground that these are simply academic discussions and have nothing to do with actual practical work of achieving the goal of universal literacy. In fact so called academic discussions of assumptions underlying literacy programs help us to escape the route of unproductive activities and gain control and knowledge of what we plan to do. We need to always justify our plans, their objectives and outcome before organizing literacy programs because if we plan that adult learners become aware and more critical as a result of adult literacy programs, we need to apply the same logic to ourselves and our plans. We need to be aware and critical of what we plan in the name of literacy drives. Challenging an approach does imply a quest for an alternative, new perspective that may arise out of debates in the literacy field. For example, you may like to have a critical look at the ten-year plan of collaborative action on the part of UNESCO that espouses literacy initiative for empowerment (LIFE). It is a global strategic mechanism for realizing the goal of universal literacy. It is committed to partnerships at regional and national levels. This document presents a dynamic concept of literacy acknowledging literacy as a tool for enhancing all aspects of life. It argues that literacy is one of the human rights and literacy is a first step to most other forms of learning. You may in turn point out that adult learn from many sources which do not include the kind of literacy that is insisted upon in most adult literacy learning centers. It is true that many adults learn from each other and much of the learning comes from such media as radio, television and films. So you may like to promote literacy as a second to developmental activities. This you would be able to do only if you engage in critical reflection about the whole issue of adult literacy learning.

An international perspective on adult literacy and post-literacy is indeed a guide for developing one's own ideas on how to go about your professional work as an adult educator. Reading through UNESCO documents gives a feeling of satisfaction that the international organization has elaborate plans of large-scale collaboration to bring about universal literacy by 2015. However, in the light of utter hopelessness of the situation on ground, UNESCO documents appear to be full of false hopes. Adult educators have begun to raise basic questions and articulate their views in the context of literacy that can pull people out of poverty. This critical thinking helps also to discover why adult literacy programs are ineffective and why a person like Sir John Daniel, President, Commonwealth of Learning, has quite negative words to say about adult educators (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2 Going Beyond the Current Status of Adult Literacy Learning

You are an adult educator. It is assumed that as an adult educator you are already aware of the national scenario on literacy in India. For example, you are of course familiar with the facts that starting from Mahatma Gandhi's basic education in 1937 (when he voiced for a coordinated teaching-learning process of hand, body and soul and learning by doing) and the Kothari Commission Report in 1966 to the Education for All (EFA) Declaration of Government of India in 2005 - all emphasized the importance of literacy. As you know Professor Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel laureate in Economics, recalled in his message at the celebrations for 2002 International Literacy Day, "There is an old Bengali saying that knowledge is a very special commodity: the more you give away, the more you have left. Imparting education not only enlightens the receiver, but also broadens the giver - the teachers, the parents, the friends."

Some questions arise in mind. Is Amartya Sen referring to adult educators? Do you have confidence in the role of adult education as it exists today? Or, is it necessary to go beyond its current status? With a co-learner, discuss the following quotation from the speech by John Daniel (2003). What does he mean by these statements?

"... adult educators have a reputation for being boring, sanctimonious, backward looking and paternalist. They have a propensity to miss the boat when new developments of importance in adult education appear on the scene. This is not a good reputation to have, especially if we want to influence governments and the wider society."

You may not agree with what John Daniel has to say about adult educators. In fact, I too do not agree with him. All the same let us try and make out what he meant when he spoke the above words about adult educators. Send your views to PALDIN e-journal on its website (to come up in near future). John Daniel has certainly spoken some unsavory words, meant to hurt the pride of adult educators. But do they ring a bell in our minds? Is there some truth lurking behind them? About twenty Delhi-based adult educators participated in a workshop, held in January 2006 at JNU. Well, some participants looked bored if not boring, while some were making a show of being keen, serious and committed. In their responses to questions about contemporary social reality, many of them were backward-looking and paternalistic. Adult educators have been described to me as a 'lazy lot' who would not be up to 'reflecting' and answering activity questions. So may be John Daniel was just being blunt and calling a spade

a spade. Or, he may be simply trying to shake us up and exhort us to take up the challenge of universal literacy. Whichever way it is, I suppose the test is right here. Let us find out during pilot testing how many learners of Unit 1 actually complete its interactive exercises and create their own meaning and understanding of literacy.

You can also compare John Daniel's statements with those of H. S. Bhola (2005: 67). He is well known among adult educators and he said,

> Adult educators in India have to understand Globalization in general and how it has influenced Indian politics, economy and health services, education—and adult education—in particular. ... As activists, Indian adult educators must work to ensure that the position regarding its political economy India is indeed protected; and that the state is not allowed to withdraw from its functions that have traditionally become a part of the social contract between the state and its citizens. They must re-commit themselves to

adult education and lifelong education and press on the state to allocate enough resources to revive the objectives and operations of the National Literacy Mission and design and launch new programs and projects of adult education for poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

Do Bhola's words inspire you to carry forward your professional pursuits with new ideas about adult literacy learning? Alternatively, would you like to form your own perspective on global, regional and national scenario on literacy? Let us proceed to initiate the process whereby you construct your own perspective. Why not try to make a beginning and complete Activity 1.1.

Activity 1.1

Reflect on your past and present experiences as an adult educator and in one page describe your ideas about an effective and successful adult educator for the twenty-first century India. It would be interesting for you to read descriptions, written by your fellow adult educators, enrolled in this course. While writing your one page you may like to include what you already know about the international scenario; the latest Dakar Framework of Action at Senegal calls upon countries to achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. UNESCO's Global Monitoring Report has recently brought out a document entitled 'Literacy for Life` (2006). It will be a good idea to have a look at this document as well, especially its chapter 1 on 'Literacy: The Core of Education for All'. This chapter gives a working definition of literacy. Here, literacy refers to 'a context-based continuum of reading, writing and numeric skills acquired and developed through the process of learning and application'. Further, you need to reconsider the model of literacy that we have so far followed in our country. In order to enlarge our familiarity with the global perspective, let us reflect on what the international agencies like UNESCO promote, where we stand currently in terms of achieving literacy, what kind of literacy it is, how we evaluate what literacy does to participants in literacy learning classes and if literacy does all that has been claimed by policy makers? Writing this one page will initiate your process of thinking about your contribution to literacy movement as a professional adult educator.

Of course, you already know that various stages of evolution in explaining and defining literacy as per the needs and demands of the period have taken place and are influenced by academic research, international policy agendas and national priorities from time to time. You also know that a commonly held viewpoint is that literacy means developing or acquisition of reading and writing skills and numeric skill is a complement to or component of literacy.

It is well known that in the international arena UNESCO started supporting the spread of adult education as part of a concerted effort to advance basic education after the Second World War. The first global survey of adult literacy, covering over sixty countries, was published in 1957. By then the world leaders and policy makers realized that education and literacy could better enable individuals to participate in and benefit from a modernizing economy. The second-half of the twentieth century witnessed international policy community stressing on the role of literacy in economic growth and national development especially in newly independent countries. In 1978, the General Conference of UNESCO adopted a definition of functional literacy which

is still in use as 'A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (or her) group, community and also for enabling him (or her) to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his (or her) own and the community's development.'

In 1958 at the General Conference of UNESCO the standard definition of literacy emerged which is: 'A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his (or her) everyday life.' The definition of literacy sometimes extends to basic arithmetic and other life skills. This definition became a yardstick for measuring literacy in national censuses.

As you are well aware, this understanding of literacy which emphasized on an exclusively skills-based view captured the attention of researcher during 1960s and 1970s. Further elaborated to use and apply skills in meaningful ways, the notion of functional literacy gained ground on the basis of linking literacy to productivity and overall socio-economic development. To use literacy in social and cultural context has also been a perspective among recent developments. Literacy has also been viewed by many educators as an active process of learning involving social awareness and critical reflection which in turn would promote social change. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire advocated integrated notions of active learning within a particular socio-cultural set up, as he wrote: 'Every reading of the word is preceded by a reading of the world'.

But, some of you may say that in order to cope with the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) age of the twenty-first century we need to have something more than the basic skills for survival. Isn't it so? Answer to this question will depend on how you wish to define literacy. Some of you may have come across the concept of 'multiple literacy' which is related to technological, health, information, media, visual, scientific and other contexts and more suited for life in the twenty-first century. Emphasis is placed not only on reading and writing, but also on skills and practices relevant to the changing demands of community life. With the emphasis on adult literacy skills in evolving labor markets and knowledge-based societies during the 1980s and 1990s, the Jometian Conference at Thailand in 1990 for Education for All (EFA) placed literacy within the broader context of meeting the basic learning needs of every child, youth and adult. It stated that these needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeric, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.' This concept of basic learning needs in terms of learning tools and learning content is invariably subject to interpretation by implementing agencies. In this sense, no one definition of literacy can reflect all its aspects. Even the EFA Global Monitoring Report's matter-of-fact definition of literacy does not lend itself to a universal and standard measurement of literacy. Also in normal process of learning one measures achievement by carrying out and completing a task while

in formal system of adult literacy learning there are formal tests to measure success. In a way we may speak of the need to enlarge the scope of externally planned and assisted adult literacy learning to include informal learning whereby literacy learning becomes a part of our social skills learning.

The above approach to learning alludes to the concept of lifelong learning that has now become the buzz word in discourse on education. As a result many adult education departments in educational institutions of higher education have even converted themselves into departments of lifelong learning. So you have now 'lifelong learning discourse' (See Roger) in which adult literacy learning has to be contextualized in terms of adult learners' perception of themselves and their self-created goals.

Activity 1.2

With the above background information that many of you already possess, systematize your ideas on literacy and as Activity 1.2 write down your definition of literacy in one page and then you can compare your definition with some other examples of definitions of literacy in various books on literacy and also on the Internet.

Let us now in sub-section 1.2.1 look at the global scenario on literacy in the perspective that you may have already begun to form about the need for literacy

1.2.1 Need for Literacy

UNESCO holds that education is a human right, but 771 million adults are illiterate (UNESCO 2005) and approximately 100 million children (UNESCO 2004) are out of school today. Many of those who enroll in primary schools drop out before acquiring adequate literacy skills. Here literacy refers to basic skills in reading, writing and numeric to have access to information about health, environment, education and the world of work. Does it mean that 771 million adults have no knowledge and skills about health and environment? What happens to skills that people without so-called literacy possess to survive and earn a living despite many odds against them? Do they not learn from each other? Have they not preserved environment for thousands of years? Asking these questions does not mean that those asking them are against literacy for all. What in fact is questioned here is the premise that illiterates have to somehow become literate in the sense of being able to read, write and count. Questioning this premise opens a window for us to understand the context for the need for literacy.

At present, 85 per cent of populations with insufficient literacy competencies live in thirty-five countries (see Annex 1 of LIFE 2006). Planners and policy makers consider that relevant policy measures, well-planned programs and sustained allocation of sufficient resources are needed to ensure that effective learning opportunities are provided to those without literacy competencies. They do not as such mention the actual use of new skills. It is recognized that women and girls are the largest group without access to education and they need focused attention, for their personal

development and for their role as mothers, and as citizens. But we do not find any mention of women and girls encumbered with the responsibilities of collecting firewood, water for sheer survival. Will reading, writing and numeric help them getting firewood and water with less exertion? Of course, we need to also give priority to other excluded and disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities, rural populations, indigenous people, people living with HIV/AIDS and disabilities. Conventional literacy programs with their focus on reading, writing and numeric can help only a few while focus on effective developmental activities can address most of those mentioned above. In a way, if were to give the need for just literacy a back seat and concentrate on effective developmental activities, it would be easier to promote the cause of universal literacy.

Given the fact that literacy is a low priority on the development and the education agendas in many countries and consequently is a weak link in the global movement towards achieving Education for All (EFA), we may rather consider a model of multiple adult literacies whereby participants engage primarily in different activities and learn reading, writing and numeric in the context of those activities. The following statements reflect a similar view.

> "Literacy is not a pre-condition for the spread of some form of basic knowledge however much it would be facilitated by literacy." (UNICEF 1990: 53-54).

> "Literacy is neither an entry requirement, nor necessary for the clientele to learn. ... the facilitation of adult and continuing learning can be provided without first teaching learners to read and write." (Bas 1991, cited in Lynch1997: 90)

> "While literacy is a pre-requisite to 'schoolability', it is not crucial to either the ability or the need of non-literates to learn." (Grandstaff 1976: 300)

The following excerpts in Box 1.3 culled from the Internet provide an idea of the wide range of multiple literacies which have now come into being. Perhaps, in your answer to Activity 1.2 you have mentioned some more forms not included in the Box 1.3.

Box 1.3 Range of Multiple Literacies

*Until recently, most of us defined literacy as the ability to read and write. Today the definition has been enlarged to include the ability to locate, evaluate, use, and communicate using a wide range of resources including text, visual, audio, and video sources.

 *Defining literacy has become increasingly complex in the information age where readers encounter many new and different types of content. Over the past few decades many "new literacies" have been identified. For instance, you can easily identify eight categories: Basic Literacy, Scientific Literacy, Economic Literacy, Technological Literacy, Visual Literacy, Information Literacy, Multicultural Literacy, and Global Awareness.

*Along with information and technology related literacies, many people have focused on other categories of literacy such as communication literacy, productivity literacy, content literacy, and critical literacy.

The knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks, (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use continuous texts) are called prose literacy. Examples include editorials, news stories, brochures, and instructional materials.

*The knowledge and skills needed to perform document tasks, (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use non-continuous texts in various formats) are called document literacy. Examples include job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and drug or food labels.

*The knowledge and skills required to perform quantitative tasks, (i.e., to identify and perform computations, either alone or sequentially, using numbers embedded in printed materials) are called quantitative literacy. Examples include balancing a cheque book, figuring out a tip, completing an order form or determining the amount of interest on a loan from an advertisement.

*According to the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information."

*ACRL, in its statement on Information Literacy and Competency Standards for Higher Education states:

Information literacy also is increasingly important in the contemporary environment of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources. Because of the escalating complexity of this environment, individuals are faced with diverse, abundant information choices in their academic studies, in the workplace, and in their personal lives. Information is available through libraries, community resources, special interest organizations, media and the Internet, and increasingly, information comes to individuals in unfiltered formats, raising questions of its authenticity, validity, and reliability.

Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning. An information literate individual is able to

❖ determine the extent of information needed

❖ access the needed information effectively and efficiently

❖ evaluate information and its sources critically

❖ incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base

❖ use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose

❖ understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information

❖ access and use information ethically and legally.

In view of the idea of multiple literacies, let us have a critical look at Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) which is a global strategic framework for the implementation of the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD 2003-2012). It is supported and led by UNESCO. As an integral component of EFA, UNLD provides both a platform and an impetus for achieving all six goals of the Dakar Framework for Action, promoting literacy under the banner 'Literacy as Freedom'. The UNLD reaffirms 'that literacy for all is at the heart of basic education for all and that creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy' (United Nations 2002). Evidently, LIFE holds literacy as a first step that would facilitate other processes like reduction in poverty, child mortality and population growth. We have on the other hand made a case for giving a backseat to literacy and

primacy to developmental activities.

1.2.2 Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE)

Let us recognize the fact that despite the importance of literacy for the achievement of global development objectives, many countries do not have enough resources and capacity to address the challenge. LIFE will be supported over ten years to implement some of the recommendations highlighted in the UNLD framework.

LIFE specifically aims to contribute to the empowerment of women, out of-school girls and their families, especially in rural areas, and of those with insufficient or no literacy skills – often the poorest and most marginalized members of society. Their empowerment in turn can have a positive impact on the quality of the lives of their families, poverty reduction, socio-economic development, and school enrolment of their children. Taking into account the principles put forward by the Delors Commission, LIFE will promote literacy throughout life so that women and men can engage in 'learning to be', 'learning to live together', 'learning to do' and 'learning to know'(UNESCO 1996). LIFE will be planned and operationalized alongside other EFA initiatives, especially the Teacher Training Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa and EDUCAIDS, the Global Initiative on HIV/AIDS and Education.
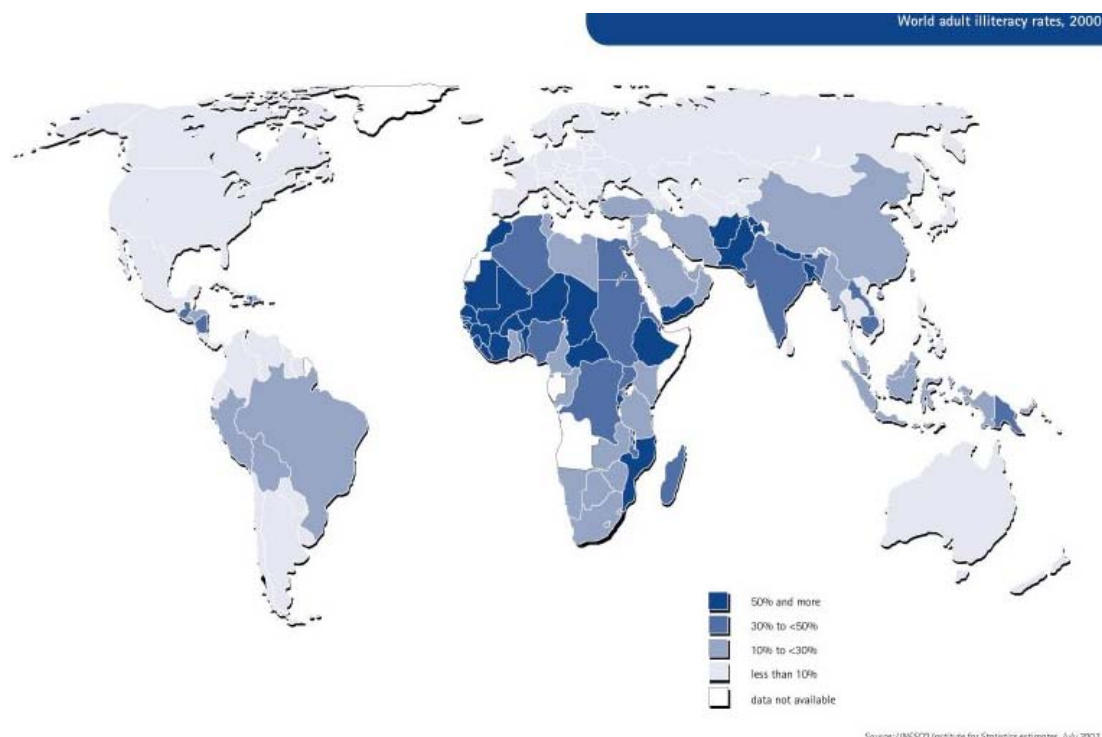
'Learning to be', 'learning to do' and 'learning to know' are all different paths that adults perform on the basis of their social skills learnt informally. Their social skills may or may not include the basic skills of literacy. In many countries even those who had gone through formal schooling have been reported to have regressed into the state of being almost illiterate. In this sense, for most adults, as Roger (Informal Learning in Lifelong Learning, page 8) says, 'it is important to give recognition and value to the informal learning about the subject matter, both the perceptions of the subject which help to create the learner's identity and strategies which have been built up within this field'. This is why Overwien (2005) and Collin et al (1989) have argued that non-formal learning through apprenticeship is more appropriate than formal schooling so that one acquires learning that is dynamic rather than 'robotic acquisition and automatization of core skills' (Luke 2005: xi).

The map given below shows the world adult literacy rates in 2000. You can see at a glance your country's adult literacy status. Obviously, we begin to feel a little uncomfortable when we look in global terms at the current status of adult literacy in India.

This situation brings home the important concern of training adult educators so that they can improve the current growth of literacy in our country. In order to operationalize plans for creating a literate society, the initiative of training adult educators is as important in India as it is in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is so because new developments of importance in adult education have appeared and it is time to make sure that we do not miss them. Adult educators cannot afford to project the image of 'being boring, sanctimonious, backward looking and paternalist' (Daniel 2003) and not notice new developments occurring in their field of activities.

Literacy meets a wide spectrum of individual needs and development goals. Your definition of literacy (hopefully

World adult illiteracy rates, 2000

50% and more
30% to <50%
10% to <30%
less than 10%
data not available

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates, July 2002.

already worked out by you in Activity 1.2) most likely reflects a much broader understanding of literacy where literacy stands for several types of skills. The concept of 'multiple literacies' can be used if you think it fits your description of literacy. Remember, we have already discussed these forms in Box 1.2.

The term 'literacy' is often used as a metaphor, as we say computer literacy or environmental literacy or legal literacy or gender literacy etc. Here, literacy is used more in the sense of skill. Is literacy something different for adult educators? Does it mean only the ability to read and write texts? Is literacy the same as 'awareness'? Is it not that one can be aware but not literate or one can be literate and not aware? To answer these questions we need to consider and be clear about the discourse on various approaches to literacy. For this purpose you may put your thinking antennae up and look into the current and previous practices of operationalizing the concept of literacy. For achieving tangible results, you would look into

objectives of adult literacy learning programs and the measures for deciding on their success.

The following examples show that literacy is important but not a pre-requisite. It can take place as and when required.

❖ In Nirantar a group of women have learnt about maintaining water pumps and in the process they learnt literacy skills as well.

❖ In Bangladesh, a group of men organized and operated a tempo service and as they made profits, they learnt also how to read and write so they could sustain their operations.

❖ In Nepal, a group of women wanted to learn to sew but they could not read the sewing manual so they were told to first learn to read and write. They lost their interest in sewing and their efforts to literacy did not also proceed well.

❖ Lalita Ramdas found that literacy classes could continue only as long as the activity helped to find work.

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If no remuneration was found, adult educators were told to go away and teach children only. As a result

Ramdas had to re-think her approach to literacy.

Let us now turn to the regional scenario on literacy.

1.3 Regional Scenario

It is well known that the overall world adult literacy rates do not reflect regional variations and we need to separately discuss the regional scenario on literacy.

## 1.3.1 Differences in Regional Literacy Rates

The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002 estimates that the overall world adult literacy rate in 2000 was 79.7% – women 74.2% and men 85.2%. Past and projected improvements in world literacy rates are shown below in Figure 1.1:

Source: Annex, Table 2.
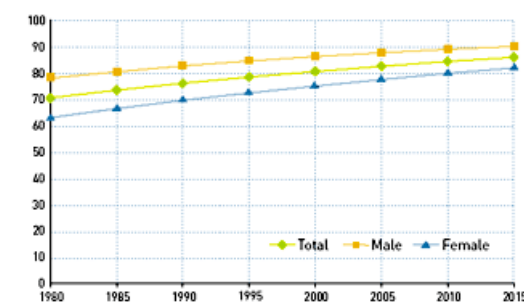
Figure 1.1 Adult Literacy Rates Worldwide (1980-2015)

As indicated above, the figures mask large regional differences, with the lowest overall rate in South and West Asia (55.3%), and the highest in Central Asia (99.6%). Sub-Saharan Africa showed the biggest increase over two decades. Figure 1.2 projects trends to 2015 on the basis of past experience:

Source: Annex, Table 2.
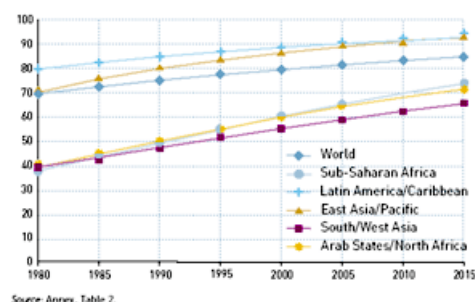
Figure 1.2 Adult Literacy Rates by Region (1980-2015)

1.3.2 Narrowing of Gender Gap in Literacy Rates

It is noteworthy that the gender gap in literacy has narrowed in all regions, and it is expected that the trend will continue to 2015 as shown below in Figure 1.3:

Source: Annex, Table 2.
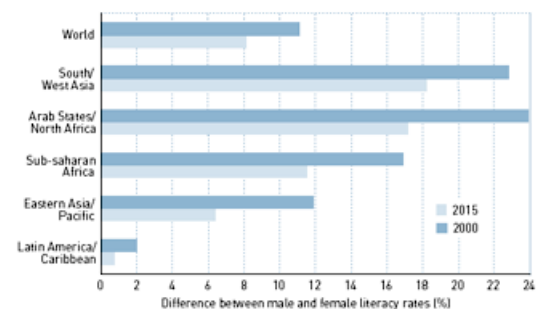
Figure 1.3 Gender Gap in Literacy Rates, by Region (2000 and 2015)

These trends and projections give us reason for hope and optimism regarding progress in literacy. Though gender differences in literacy rates are more marked among adults, there are now almost no gender difference in literacy rates of 15-24 year olds in many regions of the world. However, the absolute numbers of illiterates remain obstinately high. Of an estimated figure of 875 million illiterate adults in the world in the year 2000 nearly two-thirds were women. It has been projected that the fastest increases in literacy rates among adult women will take place in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab Sta

1.3.3 Numbers of Illiterates High in Some Regions

Literacy efforts have not kept pace with population growth – in South and West Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa numbers of illiterates have increased since 1990. Table 1.1 compares numbers of male and female illiterates by region for 1990 and 2000.

Table 1.1 Number of Adult Literates – 000's

	1990			2000		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
World	879130	324914	554216	861966	3133231	548643
Developed countries/countries in transition	21970	6660	15311	14895	4862	10033
Developing countries	857159	318254	538905	847071	308461	538610
Arab States	62400	23118	39282	67473	24310	43162
Central and Eastern Europe	16519	3833	12686	12518	2857	9661
Central Asia	480	98	383	222	73	149
East Asia and the Pacific	232904	71924	160979	186404	53412	132992
Latin America and the Caribbean	41932	18243	23689	39254	17436	21819
North America and Western Europe	11363	4024	7339	7873	2935	4938
South and West Asia	382151	151980	230171	412242	159705	252538
Sub-Saharan Africa	131380	51693	79687	135980	52595	83385

For the sake of gaining a comparative perspective, the statistics quoted above from various sources speak for themselves. We need to form a comparative perspective for locating our country's status in the regional scenario.

This exercise is useful for looking beyond our noses and spotting where and what is happening and if there is something for us to learn from others' experiences. In this context we may also glance at figures on youth literacy in our neighboring countries (see the Table 1.2). Adult literacy rate in this table is for the age group 15 years and above. Youth literacy rate is for the age group 15-24 years. The youth literacy rate for India relates to 2001. The table has been taken from UNESCO in the National Literacy Mission Website.

Table 1.2 Youth Literacy Rate for India

Country	Adult Literacy Rate	Youth Literacy Rate
China	90.9	98.9
India	61.3	73.3
Nepal	44.0	62.7
Pakistan	41.5	53.9
Sri Lanka	92.1	97.0
Bangladesh	41.1	49.7

1.4 National Scenario

We will now turn to the national scenario. Your task here is basically to discover the links between global, regional and national scenarios on literacy and then generate a profile of the local scenario on practical dimension of adult literacy learning in India. Regarding the substantive aspects of national scenario on literacy you will be reading in detail in other units of this course of PALDIN.

Practicing literacy or its practical aspects have to be understood in terms of what we consider to be the ways of learning or in other words theories of learning. With respect to the practice of adult learning and practical activities for spreading literacy, we need to have a clear understanding of theories of learning, which are subject to varying points of view, including 'collaborative learning', 'distributed learning' and 'communities of practice'. Some of these ways of looking at learning do not focus on individual learner, rather they emphasize group learning and social practices around which communities build their knowledge structures. Making a paradigmatic shift from cognitive approach to understanding literacy practices in their socio-cultural contexts, we need to go into what is known as New Literacy Studies (see Barton and Hamilton 1999, Collins 1995, Gee 1999, Heath 1993, Street 1993) and think about the everyday meanings and uses of literacy in their cultural contexts. We can also critically assess the claims of cognitive approaches to literacy and explore the potential of findings made available in New Literacy Studies. You may like to discuss Street's (1984) distinction between an 'autonomous' model and an 'ideological' model of literacy.

Autonomous model of literacy deals with practices that impose western conceptions of literacy on other cultures (see Street 2001).

The autonomous model of literacy

assumes that literacy in itself, autonomously, will influence other social and cognitive practices. This model of literacy hides its cultural and ideological assumptions and presents them as though they are neutral and objective. Research in the social practice approach has challenged this view and shows that in practice dominant approaches relying on autonomous model impose western notions of literacy on other cultures. Instead of imposing an alien conception of literacy on your society, you may like to look at an alternative model for planning literacy programs in your area.

You may like to first give a critique of the cultural and ideological assumptions of autonomous model of literacy and then look at literacy as a social practice that is embedded in socially constructed principles of knowledge.

The ideological model of literacy provides a more culturally sensitive perspective of literacy practices as these practices differ from one culture to another and from one context to another and therefore each particular version of literacy would be always ideologically rooted in a particular worldview. The ideological model of literacy has premises different from autonomous model and posits that literacy is a social practice and not just a technical and neutral skill and that it is basically rooted in socially constructed ways of how one knows something.

Clearly, literacy in this sense is always contested with regard to its meanings and practices. Working in the field of literacy is always a social act that influences the nature of the literacy being learnt and the learners already hold some ideas about literacy and about their position in relations of power.

In the light of above discussion, it is not tenable to hold the view that 'literacy' can be 'given' neutrally and its social impact can be measured afterwards.

Traditional literacy programs, based on autonomous model of literacy, have largely failed because they did not use appropriate intellectual tool to understand the diversity of literacy practices around the world and did not design literacy programs to suit the particular needs of adult learners. You can argue that organizing literacy program is to be a part of a power relationship and how adult learners take hold of such a programme depends on socio-cultural practices and not just on pedagogic and cognitive factors.

Adult educators need to address in a literacy programme all the questions about power relation among the participants, about the resources and their sources, about choices available to learners for learning one literacy rather than another type of literacy, about how learners challenge the dominant points of view of literacy.

It is worth asking about what literacy means to the concerned adults and which social contexts the use to drive meanings of literacy. Often, one has come across the fact that even non-literate persons engage in literacy activities and therefore the dividing line between literate/ non-literate is not all that obvious (see Doronilla 1996).

The new concepts of 'literacy events' and 'literacy practices' have been commonly used in New Literacy Studies. Heath (1982: 50) has explained the concept of 'literacy event' as 'any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretive processes'. Street (1984: 1) has elaborated the term 'literacy

practices' as a means of focusing upon 'the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing' and also that he term includes the social models of literacy that participants bring to bear upon those events and that give meaning to them.

The questions posed about literacy practices make one feel like going further into the complex nature o debates around literacy issues. Bringing enlightened perspectives to what an adult educator can do for achieving universal literacy is possible by questioning one's own understanding of the nature and meaning of literacy.

1.4.1 Literacy Practices in India

If we put the official view of managing and funding literacy programs vis-à-vis the perspective of our discussion on different approaches to literacy, we need to reflect on the nature of literacy programs and their objectives. This reflection enables us to make our own choices on literacy practices initiatives in adult learning activities. We need to think about implications of adopting the approach that treats literacy as the ability to read and write. Will it lead to adult literacy programs with text books and adults being taught to read and write in ways similar to those in which children are taught in schools? Is it possible to take another approach in which there is no 'task conscious-learning', instead we have 'learning-conscious learning'? What is the implication of this approach? Will it start from what adults know and what they can add to learning sessions?

According to Street (2005), this approach would involve use of 'real literacy materials' that come from everyday social life. Does it mean that we need not do anything beforehand? As Street says we need to carry out pre-programme research on what adults already know and also find out what the learners would like the programme to provide. This is quite a lot for adult educators to prepare before they take up any of the provisions made available by the government in the field of adult learning. Such advance preparation will initiate the process of building your own perceptions about the national scenario on literacy.

Being a signatory to World Declaration, India's commitment for EFA, and particularly for primary education and adult literacy became evident from Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the national policy making body's (a) endorsement of EFA goals, as underlined in India's National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and its Programme of Action (as revised in 1992); and (b) approval for accepting external funding for primary and elementary education programs (MHRD-NIEPA, 2000). Kerala with the highest literacy rate (90.86 per cent) and Bihar the lowest (47.00 per cent) represent two extremes of the Indian scenario on literacy. Social indicator like life expectancy at birth (2001-2006) is 71.61 for males and 75 for females in Kerala while in Bihar, it is 65.66 for males and 64.79 for females. Similarly another social indicator, infant mortality per 1,000 live births is only 10 in Kerala against 61 in Bihar. Also birth rate (per 1,000) is 16.9 in Kerala against 30.9 in Bihar and death rate (per 1,000) is 6.4 in Kerala against 7.9 in Bihar. All these indicators highlight the social differences in the two states and the differences show that literacy is the key to improving the quality of life (see Sen 2005:). The literacy rates in different

states for 1981 and 2001 reflect considerable variance throughout the country. Leaving aside a few states at the top and bottom, most of the states are either a little above or below the national average.

With this national scenario, adult educators in India would certainly wish to re-think the current practices in the field of adult literacy in order to achieve better results. Should we continue to borrow the formal learning methods of school? If we were to focus on informal learning methods, surely we would then need to alter our use of curricula and text book and also the way of formative and/ or summative assessment of literacy programs. For making a shift from formal learning methods to informal learning methods, or combining the formal and informal methods, we need to examine our assumptions about how one knows. Secondly, we would need to consider the cognitive consequences of learning literacy and talk about cognitive approaches to literacy.

As has been pointed out by Street (2006) both meaning of literacy and its mode of operation for research and action are highly contested issues. In order to run an adult literacy programme for attaining long-term success, we need to probe into these contested domains. Adult educators need to seek and become aware of alternative approaches to literacy work. It is only then it would become possible for them to tell their adult learners to acquire literacy for becoming aware, more critical and in control of their own development. We may also consider what Levi-Strauss (1961: 291-292) argued about literacy that it is not the royal route to liberation and it is many times a means of enslavement. This may be a polemical view but coming from a great thinker

of our times it needs to be seriously considered by adult educators of the twenty-first century.

1.4.2 Long-term Objectives and Commitments for Literacy

In the light of EFA goals and targets set up in Dakar Framework for Action and clearly aligned to social and gender equity thrusts, NLM felt the necessity to effect a certain re-focusing of its strategies pursued since 1999. The EFA-NPA's new "thrust areas" in literacy include (MHRD 2003: 85):

❖ Achievement of 75 per cent literacy level by 2007.
❖ A multi-pronged strategy to address regional, social and gender disparities in literacy.
❖ Refocusing literacy, post-literacy and CE programmes to increase and strengthen women's participation, so as to bridge gender gap in literacy.
❖ Encouraging PL and CE districts to pay special attention on mobilization and organization of women into neo-literate and self-help groups (SHGs).
❖ Special attention to socially disadvantaged groups like SCs/STs and women.
❖ 45 districts with <30% female literacy rate selected for a multi-pronged strategy to raise female literacy.
❖ Special stress with ZSS to specifically highlight strategies to take up literacy and skill up gradation programmes for SCs/STs and women in particular.

Achievement of 75 per cent literacy seemed a doable pursuit in 2003 but in December 2006, the month of writing this Unit, does it appear to be an achievable goal?

Let us remind you that it is important to be aware of what is real and what is

rhetorical in the field of literacy. Only then one is able to realistically plan for achieving some tangible results. Do you really believe some of the following claims made by various agencies on behalf of literacy drives?

❖ Literacy changes the way human beings think.
❖ Literacy leads to human modernisation and to the changing attitude about development.
❖ Literacy fosters democratic ideals and increases national productivity.
❖ Literacy will be eradicated by fifty-per cent by the year 2015.
❖ It is possible to initiate an innovative literacy programme in a modest way and sustain it through local efforts.

1.4.3 Issues of Language and Gender

If we are to be more culturally sensitive and in line with specific literacy practices required for specific cognitive skills being targeted, we need to reflect on issues of both language and gender. Explicit language policy guides the use of mother tongue in adult learning and this remains a topic of debate because access to the economic market place may require learning to take place in a language that is not one's mother tongue.

Often general views on literacy rates hide large inequalities with higher illiteracy rates among girls and women because literacy varies dramatically by gender, ethnicity and urban-rural living. However, it is worth reflecting on the fact that whether mere increase in number of women and girls can make any noticeable impact on achieving the ideal of a self-directed adult learner who is able to define her learning needs and to face the challenges of new ways of doing things with fast shifting epistemologies of workplaces. Do we not need to plan for some kind of revolution in our cultural and political settings?

The language of teaching-learning (or medium of instruction-) in adult literacy programs has, as a conscious policy, been the mother tongue from the beginning. After TLC became the dominant approach and strategy, NLM adopted the approach of leaving the issue of language of instruction, to ZSS — the reason being the language preference of learners, their numbers and feasibility of literacy primers development and transaction as the main considerations. Within a State there are many languages and dialects with or without a written script, spoken by sizeable number of people. There are cases of TLCs that used primers in 6-7 languages, as per their demographic composition and language preference of the learners. In some cases, learners not knowing regional language --- language of administration may like to become literate in that language. There are also districts with large tribal population, speaking a dialect that may or may not have a written script. In such cases, learners are initiated into literacy by using the first primer in the local dialect and switching over to regional language in second and their primers used in TLC. The reading materials in PL and CE stages are generally in regional languages.

The gender focus (to reduce gender gaps in access/provision, participation, achievement, etc., that have a more quantitative dimension) and addressing the gender bias i.e., age-old socio-economic and culturally embedded gender iniquities, have been the two distinct, but inter-related dimensions of India's literacy movement since early 1990s. Gender focus was obviously warranted by their two-thirds share in illiteracy.

The gender focus of TLCs (viz., paying greater attention in proportion to their number), however, did not come by a pre-design. It emerged from actual experience seen in the massive response of women who perceived the social sanction for their participation as an opportunity to realize their aspirations for literacy, empowerment and improvement. But the hurdles of gender inequities were pervasive, in the socio-cultural outlook, in the content of literacy primers about the role of women in society, in development, position within family, solidarity and collective assertion for their equality, and so on. The literacy movement was the first to address these issues of gender in early 1990s which lent an effective model for the gender focused primary education programs later.

1.5 Conclusion

You have in this unit demonstrated your skill of working out an explanation of the concept of literacy by defining it from the input given in study sections of this unit. You had an opportunity of also checking if your effort was along the right lines and that is how you could also improve your effort in case you felt that your definition missed out on any relevant aspect of literacy.

Secondly, you discussed various forms of literacy. Prevalence of ever-widening types of literacy makes each one of us illiterate in one sense or other and we all try to learn new skills, making literacy a lifelong endeavor.

Thirdly, you tried to work out the importance of literacy in various ways.

1.6 Apply What You Have Learnt

We now come to the last section of this unit. It has to do with the application of one's learning to one's profession as well as everyday life. This effort helps the learner to internalize one's knowledge and skills.

At this point you need to complete the important activity of applying what you have learnt in unit 1.

You imagine that under UNLD schemes, an international organization has invited you as an adult educator to participate in planning literacy operations for women of your area. As a preparatory exercise for this event you need to carry out the following type of home work.

❖ State clearly your approach to adult literacy.

❖ Profile of the community you intend to work with, focusing especially on women members of the community

❖ Kinds of constraints you as an adult educator are likely face when you implement your plans for women's literacy in the community

❖ Main components of literacy-related activities in your plans and the approach you would take to understand he meaning an practice of literacy

❖ Nature of resources you would look for implementing your plans

❖ How do you plan to acquire those resources?

❖ At what stage do you want to include women in your plans of literacy for them?

❖ Can women contribute in any way in planning and implementing the plans for their literacy?

❖ How long would plan to continue with this activity?

❖ What is the outcome that you expect out of your efforts?

❖ Who will be the best judge of the quality of your work in this matter?

Answer the above in a systematic manner and compare your answers with those of co-learners. This exercise will be largely based on our own local field situation and each learner will have unique sets of statements to make. This is why it will be quite interesting and useful to compare your responses with those of other learners. This will give you an opportunity of learning from each other.