

READING MATERIAL FOR NEO-LITERATE AND SEMI-LITERATE ADULTS

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Learning Objectives

It is expected that after reading Unit 7, you will be able to

- ❖ Reflect on your role as an adult educator in the process of creating material for neo literate and semi literate adults
- ❖ Examine existing material available for neo literate and semi literate adults
- ❖ Develop an understanding of the principles of writing for adult readers.

7.1 Introduction

Design of Unit 7 enables adult educators to appreciate the special needs of semi literate and neo literate adults for 'appropriate' reading material. The unit provides a context to the issues related to creation of reading material for adults. It will also lead you to develop a critical

perspective on mainstream reading materials. Unit 6 focuses on the following two main issues.

- (a) Issues related to the availability of reading material for neo literate and semi literate adults
- (b) Content and style of material available for adult readers

7.2 Neo-literates and Semi-literates

A neo-literate is an adult or an adolescent who did not or could not make use of the available educational opportunities on time, and who at a later stage acquired the skills of literacy through formal or non-formal approaches. Majority of neo-literates are economically poor and live in rural areas or urban slums. A large number of adult women who became literate after participating in the Total Literacy Campaign in the 1990s are neo

literates. Neo literates have fragile levels of literacy. In the absence of 'appropriate' reading material, such learners can easily relapse into illiteracy.

Semi literate is that adult or adolescent who has low levels of formal education. School drop outs or those who have studied up to the 5th or the 8th standard constitute this category of learners. Here too the lack of practice in reading and writing overtime can easily lead to the loss of literacy skills.

Activity 7.1

What image comes to mind when you think of a neo literate or a semi literate person? Write down your response in not more than 2-3 minutes.

7.2.1 The Adult and Continuing Education Department's Categories of Adult Learners

The Adult and Continuing Education Department of the Government of India has divided learners into three categories according to their levels of literacy and numeracy.

- ❖ **Level I** includes those who have the ability to read and write words/ sentences using most frequent letters and vowel signs; read and write numbers up to 50; write ones own name.
- ❖ **Level II** has those who have the ability to read and write words and

sentences, almost all the letters, all vowel signs and some conjunct letters; read and write up to 100 and do simple addition and subtraction up to 100; write names of family members and ones address.

- ❖ **Level III** includes those who can read and comprehend a small passage (usually text/ newspaper headings, road signs etc; compute simple problems of multiplication and division involving numbers up to 100; apply skills of writing and numeracy in day to day activities .i.e. writing letters, filling forms etc.

Activity 7.2

Part 1: What according to you is the kind of material that neo literate and semi literate adults like to read? Make a list of all such material.

Part 2: What is the kind of material that you like to read? You may have more than one favorite, so make a list of everything that you like to read. This list does not refer to material that you read as part of your work, for example teaching learning material, curricula, primers etc. In your list include material that you enjoy reading.

Questions

- i. Is there a difference in the two lists?
- ii. Is the second list longer than the first?
- iii. Is there more variety in the type of material in the second list?
- iv. Does the first list include reading material that is more functional in nature?

Reflect

If the answer to all or most of the questions is YES, there is a need to reflect and understand the divide between 'us' and 'them'.

7.2.2 Content and Style of Material available to Neo-literate and Semi-literate Adults

Material that is specially created for neo and semi literate readership is usually exceedingly dull, and preaches worthy messages which are deemed necessary (by 'us') for the poor ('them') to help them improve their lives. There is also a tendency to tell readers about the way things 'should' be. Cleanliness, hygiene, family planning, and vaccination are often the subject matter of such publications. The image of rural people as being ignorant, dirty and lazy is often reinforced. Women's issues are seldom discussed, and women are almost always portrayed within the stereotyped context of performing household tasks, or being part of the scenery instead of central to the plot itself.

Compare this material to what 'we', the educated, like to read. We are literally spoiled for choice. Far more information is available than we can possibly read and digest. We are curious to hear about news from the wider world and about current events. And we like to read for entertainment - novels, romance, thrillers and science fiction; we regard access to enjoyable and useful reading matter as an inalienable right.

Why then should readers in rural areas have such a limited range of reading material available to them? Why is 'their' need different from 'ours'? Why is their right to literacy and education not complemented by an equally important

right to regular access to enjoyable and informative reading material? We need to reflect on these questions.

The divide between what readers want and what is provided for them, and the underlying notions of 'doing good' and 'bettering people's lives', reflects in most of the little reading material published for neo and semi literate readers. It falls upon those who are writing for neo-and semi literate readers therefore to make available to such readers a rich variety which meets their needs for information and also entertainment. This means respecting and recognizing the right of adults to learn.

7.2.3 Some Statistics about Adult Learners

The Global Monitoring Report, 2007 (UNESCO) highlights the grim situation of education in various countries of South and West Asia. The report states

781 million adults (one in five worldwide) lack minimum literacy rates. Two-thirds are women. Literacy rates remain low in South and West Asia...Without concerted efforts to expand adult literacy programmes, by 2015 the global number of adult illiterates will have dropped only by 100 million. Governments must also focus on building literate environments.

The National Readership Study (NRS) is the largest annual study conducted to understand reading habits and availability of reading material in the country. The 2006 NRS data highlights the gap between urban and rural India in terms of availability of reading material. The study data reveals that there are 359 million people who can read and understand one or the other

language but do not read any publication. Of this 359 million, 68 per cent read Hindi. It is not just affordability that is a constraint.

The NRS 2006 has - for the first time in India - attempted to capture the topics that interest readers across different strata of society. Apart from News and

Politics, Sports is the topic of interest among readers. This is followed by Films and TV Serials. While the level of interest among urban audiences is higher than among rural audiences, urban and rural up-market readers exhibit very similar patterns.

7.3 Adult Educators to Bridge the Information Gap

It is quite clear that the large number of neo and semi literate readers in rural areas have very little access to sources of information. Libraries, in addition to other resources, form a major source of information. However, libraries in rural areas are not well equipped to cater to the information needs of neo and semi literate readers. Lack of vision and adequate human and financial resources are some of the reasons for the present status of rural libraries. While some efforts have been made by NGOs in recent years to start libraries in rural areas, these efforts are limited and inadequate. In several places reading material is provided only once in the year. Most publications available address

issues of health, child care, fertility control and employment. Few efforts are made to encourage and develop a culture of reading. Women rarely access reading material in libraries. In most places it is only men and boys that visit libraries regularly.

The role of adult educators and those working on issues of education is extremely critical in bridging this information gap. Efforts need to be made to provide informative and interesting reading material to neo and semi literate readers. With this background, it is also important to look at the issue of gender in relation to reading material for readers with low levels of literacy.

Activity 7.3

What do you understand by gender? How do you come across gender issues in your work as an adult educator? Take about 15-20 minutes to think and write your answer on a separate sheet of paper.

Reflect

Do you think that gender is related to the biological difference between men and women? Or in your view, is gender a synonym for women and women related issues?

7.3.1 Issue of Gender in Literacy Materials

Before looking at gender in materials, it is necessary to look at and question our own understanding of this issue. Read Box 7.1 and compare with it your answers to questions in Activity 7.3 and the following Reflection.

Box 7.1 What is Gender?

Gender is a socio-cultural concept. It varies greatly across contexts. Gender roles are specific to societies and are constantly changing/ fluid.

Gender relations give the impression that they are permanent and based on naturally drawn sexually different roles. However, their main aim is to establish and maintain social order. In the process they have created unequal power relations between men and women and have denied women equity in matters of rights/ space/ freedom/ choices.

Critical aspects of gender are that

- ❖ It assigns *different* and *unequal* roles and attributes of “masculine” and “feminine” to men and women.
- ❖ In practice, it categorizes these ‘masculine’ and “feminine” roles and attributes as “natural” differences, this makes unequal relations seem normal.
- ❖ Gender is revealed to be a construction rather than a given if we shift the perspective from gender as difference to gender as concretely experienced dominance then gender changes from what seems normal to what calls for questioning.
- ❖ Gender relations are not static; they vary across cultures and time. They are dynamic and recreate new ways in which masculinity and femininity are constructed and communicated in a particular context or period.
- ❖ Since gender is an evolving concept it is open to re examination and change. Gender relations are not sacrosanct, in fact existing gender relations need to be questioned.

As people involved in the area of adult education we come across gender relations in our own lives. In our work at educational institutions, schools etc we witness gender at play. This is also true for materials - textbooks, magazines, newsletters, teaching learning material etc. Therefore, it is extremely important for us to analyze material from a gender perspective (see Box 7.2). Let us do this by looking at a few publications and complete the series of Activity 1.4, Activity 1.5, Activity 1.6, Activity 1.7 and Activity 1.8.

Activity 7.4

Analyze the illustrations in a school text book (selected by you) from a gender perspective.

Do you see gender stereotypes in any one or more than one illustration? To check your answer, turn to Box 7.1 to look at how these illustrations can be analyzed.

Box 7.2 Gender in Illustrations

In each set of illustrations, look for the representation of a problematic situation, according to the authors of the book. Look for another set of illustrations that represents an ideal situation and has a balanced perspective. However, if you put on your gender lenses, you will see that both sets illustrations are problematic.

You may discover that in all illustrations women are shown in stereotypical roles - women are involved in household work, their characters are passive and they are not in decision making roles, unlike the men in the illustrations.

Such illustrations tell us a lot about the perspective of the writers of the book. Division of labor and roles according to the biological sex of a person need to be questioned, not reinforced as has been done in the illustrations. The illustrations make these differences seem natural and normal. This does not enable the learner to analyze the

critical abilities that enable learners reflect, analyze and question the issues from a perspective that is sensitive to issues of gender.

Activity 7.5

Select a story that includes some women characters and read it once just like hat and read it again with your gender lenses on.

Where do you see gender in the story? What are the words used to describe the gender roles and gender-based division of labor in everyday activities? Is the difference in these words only a matter of language or is language also biased in terms of gender?

Write your responses to the above questions.

Activity 7.6

Select an article that deals with both genders. It may be from any mainstream magazine. Read the article and answer the following questions. Write your responses on a separate sheet of paper.

How would you analyze the article from a gender perspective?

What, according to you are the gender issues in the article?

You may discover that the activities related to analysis of materials point to the following important issues related to gender in materials.

- ❖ Gender does not mean a mere inclusion of women in materials. Illustrations that include women or articles/stories/chapters with women cannot address the issue of gender in materials.
- ❖ Often material reinforces and strengthens existing stereotypes. The manner in which men and women are represented, roles assigned, norms followed, needs to be questioned in order to address the issue of gender in materials.
- ❖ Gender does not work in isolation. It is closely linked to other issues of caste, class, religion, rural-urban backgrounds and other identities.
- ❖ Role reversals need to be avoided. Stories, articles and images showing girls going to school, boys drawing water from wells or women in the public domain and men doing household work are too simplistic in nature. These do not enable readers to question the complex nature of gender relations.

While reading publications - mainstream or those developed by NGOs, you need to remember to analyze these from a gender perspective (see Box 7.2). Similarly, while watching plays, films, television programs, look out for gender stereotypes or places where gender norms have been questioned or challenged. This analysis should also inform our writing.

Box 7.2 Readings and Resource Material on Gender

1. *Larki kya hai, larka kya hai*- Kamla Bhasin
2. Understanding Gender- Note by Nirantar, a centre for gender and education, New Delhi
3. Gender Issues in Education- National Curriculum Framework 2005 Position Paper- NCERT
4. *Zindagi in Nazron se* (a compilation of gender stories) - Nirantar
5. *Pitara* Issue Numbers 50, 55- Nirantar

Activity 7.7

In order to write articles and stories for adults, make list of the places from where you are likely to get information.

How many places do you have on your list?

Reflect

It is possible to collect information from a range of sources. These include primary as well as secondary sources of information. Primary sources could include- schools, hospitals, education and health centers, offices in the area (government, non government), railway station, bus stand, panchayat offices, events in the area, shops, public places, markets etc. Local people can also provide information on local history, events, and incidents and could also be a source of information for folk stories and folk culture. Secondary sources would include- newspapers, books, magazines, NGO publications and other publications. Libraries, internet, encyclopedia and reference books also provide us information on a range of issues.

It is important to authenticate the source from where we are accessing information. On the one hand it is important to distinguish between 'fact' and 'fiction', what gets told as news may not necessarily be true so it is important for us to collect facts from a range of people and use these as the basis for writing. On the other hand it is also important to check information that we access from secondary sources. Websites, publications should have references for the information provided. Wrong information or presentations of facts that have not been authenticated will lead to us providing incorrect information to readers.

Activity 7.8

Select a paragraph in a story that includes women characters and read each sentence and circle the words that are not part of your everyday language.

How many circles do you have in the paragraph? Can you think of simpler words for the words that you have circled?

Reflect

To be sensitive to the needs of neo literates and semi literates in terms of language used is important given that this requires a conscious effort to write in a way that is appropriate for this readership. All our formal school education has rewarded writing in ways (for instance in formalized Hindi) which neither allows us to express ourselves in an uninhibited way nor is the style easy or enjoyable for those who are reading.

7.3.2 Issues of Language in Literacy Materials

While writing it is important to write in the way that we speak and use '*bol chaal ki bhashaa*'. We should avoid formal and difficult words as Hindi is not the language of self-expression and communication in most 'Hindi speaking

states'. Mainstream Hindi is also an iconic symbol of power and the powerful. While a wide range of reading material in Hindi is available, it is usually written in a style that is incomprehensible and intimidating. Stories, poems and other literature are not available to a large number of readers with low levels of

literacy as the language used is too formal and difficult.

Read

1. *Navsaksharon ke liye kis tarah ki*

saamagri upyukt hai- Article by Nirantar

2. Writing for neo literates- Article by KK Krishna Kumar, BGVS

Activity 7.9

Ask five people you know to list the languages that they can speak, read or understand. Make a list of these.

Questions

- (i) How many languages are there in your list?
- (ii) According to you, how many of these are languages?
- (iii) How would you classify the remaining?
- (iv) On what basis have you made this distinction?

Very often we do not give enough importance to certain languages. There is a distinction made between 'language' and 'dialect', and languages are given more importance than dialects. Dialects are often referred to as '*dehati bhasha*', there is a connotation of it being 'separate' and 'lower'. What we need to question is **whether this distinction between language and dialect is real or a politically created division.**

To understand this we need to first question our own understanding of language. The following definitions of 'language' are considered significant by most people.

- ❖ It is a medium of expression.
- ❖ It implies listening, explaining and understanding.
- ❖ It involves thinking. We 'think' in language.
- ❖ Language is a source of identity. It plays an important role in making us feel 'same' or 'different'.
- ❖ It is also a medium for the creation of an image.
- ❖ It is a source of motivation for some.

- ❖ It is a means of bringing people together by binding them with a sense of belongingness. However, this also happens only if there is sensitivity in the language and the way that it is used.
- ❖ Just as language can bring people together, it can also be a medium of discrimination.

Emergence of Hindi as the language of the power: During the freedom struggle there was an effort to promote a single identity - that of a Hindu nation - based on a divisive strategy against the common enemy, namely 'Muslims'. With political power in the hands of those promoting this ideology, Hindi automatically spread to the south and other regions where it is not commonly spoken. Simultaneously, the ideas of 'Bharat' and 'Pakistan' were born. It is not very clear at what point in time the identity of religion emerged as the most significant one, but if we read the Congress documents of that time we will see that the language used and the politics were closely related to each other. Language forums started taking sides with politicians. Gandhi promoted

Hindustani, which is a combination of Urdu and Hindi. By the 1930's it was decided that the national language would be Hindi-Hindustani. The faith of Muslims in Hindus and in the Hindu leaders collapsed at this development. They felt the need for a separate Urdu identity. It is interesting to note that what is today called Urdu was originally called 'Hindi', 'Hindvi', or 'Indui'. Hence, it was all about power play. Gradually it became acceptable that only that which is written in Devanagari script should be called Hindi. Subtly, it implied that Hindi is therefore the domain of 'dev' (Hindu god) and of 'nagar' (city - not village). Songs that are promoted also promote a certain ideology. For instance, 'vande mataram' is a song from Bankim Chandra Chatterji's "Anandamath". In this novel, Muslims are not shown in a good light, but the English are. 'Durga' - the goddess - was depicted in glorification as the one responsible for the destruction of the Muslims. Hence, certain images are depicted in a certain way in literature.

Tagore refused to accept this as the national song, and with the promotion of this song its ideology, gradually the Muslims began to feel threatened. And it is due to this language that the demand for Pakistan gained popularity. What is ironical is that within 24 years there was a demand for a free nation in the name of language - Bangla - not religion as it was in 1947, and the Bangladesh war ensued. But in Mujibur Rahman's time the politics and the identity of religion again took over.

7.3.3 Language and Communication

One of the functions of language is communication - speaking, listening, and understanding each other. While

listening it is also important to be able to transform. Interpretation of language plays an important role in communication. It is necessary that not only one point of view gets heard and that all 'parties' get a voice in any discourse. Effective communication is achieved by presenting different sets of ideas and the analysis skills to look at them critically. We are mere facilitators to help people; we cannot impose ideas and change normally takes a lot more time and more discussions. The use of language and of folk media is critical. Music - the tone, music, beats, words - is associated with people's lives so they like it much more than serious songs - e.g. - Nachari (of Mithila), Baul (of Bengal), etc.

Even if language is changed across cultures, the tone, music, and beats are very important. That is why in working with communities, sometimes religious and popular music is what works best. Folk music does not stay permanent in a particular form; it is dynamic. For instance, the emergence of Rabindra Sangeet in Bengal was in reaction to certain kinds of music and the effort was towards generating equality through music; but the purists of Bengal today do not allow any change in it and Rabindra Sangeet is considered the forte of a few people only.

It is often said that Gandhi was successful because he spoke the people's language. Although he used songs, words, images, etc, that some people thought were 'right-wing' there was so much acceptance among the communities. He used language very effectively. In the Gandhi Ashram publication 'Bhajanawali' there are numerous prayers. Reading numerous prayers exposes readers to numerous languages and therefore, multiple

identities. It's all about availability and accessibility to 'choices'.

The politics of language: Language is also not static. We add our values, desires and viewpoint to every image. This is what language also does. Every generation adds new words, new perspectives, new thoughts, etc, to an existing language. The synthesis of the word used for Dalits over a period of time illustrates this point very clearly. Jyotiba Phule spoke of education for the 'ati-Shudra' and Premchand, Mahadevi Varma, etc, used the word 'chamar'. Use of such language may be insulting for the marginalized community. Gandhi changed the language and made a political statement by referring to the Dalits as Harijan - 'Hari' refers to 'god' but 'jan' refers to the fact that 'all are equal'. Ambedkar advocated that social justice is based on law. He and Gandhi used law - an English weapon - in order to fight the English. Ambedkar renamed the Harijans as 'Dalit'. Dalit is a political word that indicates the real situation - it has the connotation of oppression as well as the pride of a separate identity - unlike Harijan, which is still accepting the caste structure and is ignoring the reality. Thus, we see the movement in the use of language in Shudra à Harijan à Dalit, depending on the politics of language at different points of time.

Language need not always have sound; it could communicate a lot through gestures, 'andaaz', style, and physical appearance. It is probably true that unless we internalize our values it does not translate into action and practice. And as we may use language to convey positive messages, sometimes language divides as much as it seals and perpetuates stereotypes. Control and ownership over resources also determines language and power, as is often the case with the politics

between the vernacular and the mainstream languages.

In all societies, children and women sometimes use play and playful language so that it is not understood by others. Through this playful exercise they 'create their own language' that is different from and not understood by the power structures of the world. Sometimes silences also speak volumes, which may or may not be understood and accepted by society. Children, women, adivasis and other marginalized groups often keep quiet - it could be an indication that they do not want 'outsiders' to enter their world. If you enter you will exploit them. Silence here is a form of protest; silence also means high levels of comfort of living with oneself. Hence, silence or play language helps to create a different world - and hence, give a sense of 'security' and independence. Thus, language perpetuates power relations. The fact that power and language are closely related to each other is also reflected in that the abusive language is usually insulting for women. Another example of it is how gendered language can perpetuate patriarchal relations.

It is extremely important that we recognize the richness and diversity of language in varying cultural contexts. For instance, among the Great Andamanese, people use different words for 'my eye', 'your eye', 'his/her eye', while in most other languages there is only one word. In Hindi for example it is much simpler and there is only one word for 'eye'.

Use of words qualifying femininity and masculinity in language are indicative of the subtle references to power and gender relations. For instance, in Subhadra Kumari Chauhan's poem she speaks of the valiant '*Jhansi ki rani*', and uses the word '*mardani*' (man-like) to describe her

patriotism. Writers like Premchand and Agryeya used names to depict political relations. The story aptly titled 'Roz' describes the love that has dried up because life is so monotonous and there is so much drudgery.

In today's context stories of fairies and ghosts have almost disappeared from our lives. Some folk tales that still exist illustrate how creativity exists in language. An example is that of the oral history of Santhals. According to them, the earth was made by an earthworm; yet other tales say that a tortoise carries the shell on its back, which is the earth. Within folk culture, there is a lot in the cultural expression that talks about history, identity and language.

The stories from the Arabian nights were told in such a way that every night there would be an incomplete tale. This leaves so much to the imagination of the reader. Good stories should have open-ended story lines that would leave a lot open to the imagination of the reader. What is happening today is that many of these stories are being removed from the school curriculum and they are being made commodities that are put on television, in advertising and in the market. If we forget all this we are limiting our lives and opportunities. And even social change makers should keep in mind these aspects while producing material.

There is a power play among languages. Hindi has emerged as the most powerful language among all the Indian languages. We often speak of other languages that we speak as an afterthought. This shows how 'less powerful' languages face 'inhibition' in public forums where they may be considered 'indecent', and '*dehati*' in comparison with a 'mainstream' language. People from 'marginalized' communities do not speak openly in public spaces because they feel

inhibited. Do limited physical region, limited numbers, lack of acceptability and lack of political strength affect the power of a language?

Even a look at the VIII Schedule will give us an idea that the number of languages recognized in the Constitution has increased, but it is languages like Santhali, Bodo and Nepali that have got acceptance - all because of political reasons. Thus, it seems that the power of languages changes over time - the best example being that of 'Hindi' being recognized and the Devanagari script being the identity for the 'Hindi' language. Before the 1940s there were a lot of Hindu writers in Urdu, but not after the 1940s. Similarly, as Bawa Karant (a Hindi 'pracharak') said - the division of states in India is largely based on the identity of language. After Partition, the English language took over its official status in order to prevent language based conflicts from emerging. Ironically, in Tamil Nadu, the majority of the people learn Hindi but it is not a politically accepted language. The English model of education gained popularity and provided the common ground where voices spoke against discrimination on the basis of caste, class, etc. The teachers however all belonged to the Brahmin community and the fears of power relations remaining status quo were realized. These changes take place due to the social, historical and economic aspects in politics. Hindi is today considered the national language because of the views propagated by the polity. There is no Constitutional basis for this belief.

The other important aspect in the politics of language is the script. The question is - is it important for a language to have a script to be recognized? Is it possible for a single language to be written in different scripts? Is it possible to write numerous languages in a single script?

As we develop an understanding on language and power, it is important for us to keep the following issues in mind while writing.

- ❖ It is possible and desirable to write in the local language (s) while writing for adults. Since people's life worlds, experiences, imagery are best expressed the local language, using this can be powerful means of communication.
- ❖ Language, both written and oral, constructs, defines and represents our reality. Language is political. It is laden with power. And there are clear hierarchies. Written languages are up there in the evolutionary ladder. Oral traditions are mere dialects. There is a need to question and challenge this belief.
- ❖ Textbooks and written material often tell the story of 'civilizing the uncivilized'. In other words, the message given out is that adivasis, children, Dalits, women and other marginalized groups need to be 'civilized'. This needs to be critiqued. Our writing/language should not reinforce these stereotypes.
- ❖ Based on our experiences and work, we can say that the less 'pure' a language is the more beautiful and richer it is.
- ❖ Textbooks often give rise to a 'dead' language - they promote the 'pure' rather than the 'beautiful'.
- ❖ It is the role of the adult educator to introduce learners to the nuances of

different languages and cultures. An interesting illustration is with regard to the word 'khulasa'. While the Urdu language understands it as 'brief' in Hindi it means 'detailed' - which have diametrically opposite meanings.

- ❖ Grammar is the mere 'making meaning' out of the language construction that society makes. Grammar does not determine what meaningful language is and what is not.
- ❖ Grassroots experience shows us how the realities of people are sometimes distant from our curricula. An example is from the literacy work carried out at the Sahajani Shiksha Kendra. As part of the curriculum, the first letters introduced through the literacy material is '*namak*' (salt). But the women immediately responded by saying that their word for salt in Bundeli is '*non*'.
- ❖ While writing in the local language, there is always a concern - which local language to use? One should always see the consensus of the people that we work with- the language that is understood by the majority should be used and not what is described as 'pure' language.

Suggested reading for the above sub-section 7.3.3 of the unit

Stories: Bhaktin, Chini Feriwallah, Hansi, Thakuri Baba

Articles: Gaaliyan and Prakatthan, Bhasha, Boli and Shoshan by Ramakant Agnihotri.

7.4 Feedback of Adult Learners on Materials Produced for Adult Learning

Writing articles for neo literate and semi literate adults is a specialized task.

As we have seen issues of perspective, language, style become very important

while writing for this constituency. At the same time it is important for us to understand the needs of readers and to **get feedback** from them. The information we get back from readers enables us to understand them and their needs better, and to modify our writing accordingly.

Feedback can be sought in several ways. In feedback sessions, we can:

- ❖ Ask readers to read the article/ story/ piece of writing whilst we take note of where they are stopping to see what they find difficult and what they are comfortable with.
- ❖ Ask readers to do a ranking of items that they liked after giving them a range of pieces to read.
- ❖ Divide readers into small groups, and asked them to read and explain to others the meaning of a particular article.
- ❖ Conduct a debate between two groups of readers on a particular piece of writing. The arguments that they use to defend their views will be an indication of what the article/ writing has communicated.
- ❖ It is also possible to design a

questionnaire to ask readers to note what they liked and disliked about our publication, and what suggestions they could make for improving it. However, there is a danger that readers will only tell us what they think we want to hear. It may be difficult to evoke spontaneous responses from readers.

- ❖ It is also possible to conduct in-depth interviews with readers. This means that we will have to spend time with readers in order to understand their reading habits, look at what reading material is available in their areas and how/whether they are being able to access this, the time that they spend on reading. This could be also be done by providing readers a number of publications and observing what is picked up first, what is read first, what they understand/enjoy and what is difficult.

It is a good idea to go through some select case studies to go about your task of preparing appropriate material for adult learners. You may select your case-studies on the basis of your work experience in adult learning setups

7.5 Apply What You Have Learnt

What according to you constitutes good writing? Select three articles that look at the issue of sex determination of unborn child.

Read the articles and respond to the following questions.

- i. Are all three articles written in simple language, in *bol chaal ki bhaashaa*?
- ii. Do all three articles provide new information to the reader in a language and style that is simple but that does not simplify the concept?
- iii. Which out of the three is didactic in nature and why?
- iv. Which article assumes a level of information that readers may not have?
- v. What are your views on the introduction, structure and conclusion of each article?
- vi. What is the length of sentences?
- vii. Is the heading appropriate? What kind of headings should be used?

viii. After responding to all these questions, which article according to you communicates the information related to sex determination in the best way possible to readers?

Make a list of the principles of writing that make this the most effective article.

While writing on issues that relate to health, *panchayati raj*, agriculture, livelihoods, etc. you may consult the following important points that will make writing more effective.

- ❖ Writing needs to have a peg. Articles written around events, incidents, issues that are topical are easy to relate to even if they are outside the readers immediate concern.
- ❖ Articles need not be written in an essay style.
- ❖ Writing needs to be simple, not simplistic. Complex issues should be kept alive.
- ❖ Avoid using explicit definitions when introducing new words. Instead, weave the definition of the word/concept or the idea around a sentence.
- ❖ Articles need to raise questions on the very nature of development and government policies.
- ❖ Articles need to provide new information but there need not be an overload of information. Use statistics, data judiciously. Statistics is not always easy to relate to. Percentages, ratio etc need to be explained. So instead of writing 'sex ratio is 753', explain and write 'for every 1000 men there are only 753 women, which means that there are 247 women less (or missing) for every 1000 men in the country.'
- ❖ Articles need to have a flow. Use short paragraphs and link each

paragraph to the previous one.

- ❖ The beginning of each article needs to be interesting. It needs to highlight the seriousness of the issue or it needs to provide new information. Long introductions that do not provide new/interesting information are not effective and do not encourage readers to read further.
- ❖ At the end the article needs to raise questions or comment on the topic covered. It is not a good idea to leave too many questions left unanswered. The conclusion need not be moralistic or message loaded.
- ❖ Avoid using jargons of development work.
- ❖ Headings need to be interesting. Catchy titles generate interest. Straightforward headings can also be used for clarity. Use sub headings to explain further if the headings are not too explicit.
- ❖ Sentences need not have more than 14 words. Each page needs to be limited to 250-270 words. Keeping in mind the literacy and comprehension levels of neo literate and semi literate readers, lengthy sentences/articles are difficult to comprehend.

Read

You may like to read a few examples of articles and stories that have been popular with neo and semi literate readers. Read the articles keeping in mind the points mentioned above.

Story from Pitara, BGVS booklet, Katha series

You may also like to read 'Pitara- simple, not simplistic'- article in the book Reading Beyond the Alphabet- Eds. Brij Kothari, Vijay Shree Chand, Michael Norton.

