# Information Literacy in India: An Overview

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**ABSTRACT**

Information literacy (IL) is the set of skills and knowledge that allows us to find, evaluate, and use the information we need, as well as to filter out the information we don't need. IL skills are the necessary tools that help us successfully navigate the present and future landscape of information. Information and technology affects every person in every possible setting work, education, recreation. Here information literacy can play a vital role in educating the users of libraries on various information and documentary resources, where to start searching of information, what where and how to access them, how to assess and compare retrieved information, how to communicate their information or findings to the general masses and experts, and so on.

**Keywords:** Information Literacy, Lifelong Learning, ICT, Learning Society information skills, information process, technology skills.

## INTRODUCTION

In the Information Age we live in, Information Literacy (IL) is essential in order to access information at the right time and use them to make intelligent decisions. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has facilitated information explosion and knowledge boom in all disciplines. The role played by the Library and Information science professional is even greater. Librarians have to deliver the right kind of information services to the right kind of users. The librarian's traditional roles have changed and they are now dynamic managers of information. UNESCO's Millennium Development Goal also focuses on Information Literacy.

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". 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 about its authenticity, validity and reliability. In addition, information is available through multiple media, including graphical, aural, and textual, and these pose new challenges for individuals in evaluating and understanding it. The uncertain quality and expanding quantity of information pose large challenges for society. Library and Information Science professionals have the task of handling the information explosion and deliver the right kind of information services to the right users at the right time. Library and Information Science professionals are expected to guide the users for using the right information and develop the skill of users.

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## INFORMATION LITERACY

Information and technology literacy is clearly the "basic skills set of the 21st century". This is widely recognized and accepted for all types of workers – entry level to top executives. For example, in 1991 the US Department of Labour's SCANS report stated that competencies for all entry level employees must include the ability to: (i) acquire and use information, and (ii) work with a variety of technologies. This is information and technology literacy for all. On the top-end, Peter Drucker, well known management guru stated that "executives have become computer-literate…but not many executives have become computer-literate". Drucker is saying that being able to use computers is not enough. Executives must be able to apply computer skills to real situations and needs. Executives must be able to identify information problems and be able to locate, use, synthesise, and evaluate information in relation to those problems. Information and technology affects every person in every possible setting- education, public service, and business. Education is fundamentally information-based. That is, every aspect of learning and teaching requires the gathering, processing, and communication of information. In the past in education, there was a reliance on one primary information resource: the textbook. But this is rapidly changing due in large part to the explosion in information technology and networked information. The same is true in public service-citizens are increasingly turning to web based, electronic sources services for information. And, today's successful companies are those that focus on meaningful uses of information and technology and hire employees who are able to apply technology to a range of situations. Information Literacy services and instruction are essential components of every 21st Century library and information programme. Whether offering direct instruction to users, providing skills-based help function on websites, delivering one-on-one (physical or virtual) assistance, or even providing meaningful signage in a physical setting, every information and library situation requires helping users to succeed through improving their information skills or understandings. The purpose of any library or information organization is to meet the information needs of its users. Information Literacy, by ensuring that users are effective in seeking and using information, is an important part of fulfilling this purpose (Michael B.Elisenberg, 2008).

## PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN INDIA

Public library development in the state is the responsibility of the respective state government. Ten states in India have enacted Public Libraries Act in their states. The library legislation ensures the smooth functioning of the public libraries in the state. A state may have three tiers of public libraries in hierarchy. The apex body would be a state central library, the next tier consists of district libraries in all districts of the state, and third tier consists of rural and urban public libraries spread all over the state. Public Libraries Act also ensures each village or city at least have one government-aided public library. This Act also makes provisions of finances, human resources and other resources for the development and functioning of public libraries. Some state governments provide grants for the public libraries; some other state governments collect Library Cess from the taxpayers. The states that passed Public Libraries Act are shown below along with the year:

1. Tamilnadu Public Libraries Act, 1948 having provision for library cess (10%) on property tax;

2. Andhra Pradesh Public Libraries Act, 1960 having provision for library cess (8%) on lands and buildings;

3. Karnataka Public Libraries Act, 1965 having provision for library cess (6%) on lands, buildings, vehicles and profession;

4. Maharashtra Public Libraries Act, 1967 - No library cess - State Government meets the expenditure;

5. West Bengal Public Libraries Act, 1979 - No library cess - State Government meets the expenditure;

6. Manipur Public Libraries Act, 1988 - No library cess;

7. Kerala Public Libraries Act, 1989 having provision for library cess (5%) on property tax and not less than 1% of State expenditure on education;

8. Haryana Public Libraries Act, 1989 - Local bodies to levy cess;

9. Goa Public Libraries Act, 1993 - Surcharge on IFML @ 0.50 ps. Per ltr. And 0.50 ps. On bulk bear per ltr. And 1% on State Education Budget;

10. Mizoram Public Libraries Act, 1983 - No library cess - State Govt. meets the expenditure;

11. Gujarat Public Libraries Act, 2002 - No library cess;

12. Orissa Public Libraries Act, 2002 - No library cess.

13. Uttarkhand Public Libraries Act, 2005

14. Rajasthan Public Libraries Act, 2006

15. Uttarpredesh Public Libraries Act, 2006

16. Bihar Public Library & Information Centres Act, 2008

17. Chaatisgarh Public Libraries Act, 2008

| Sl. No. | Name of the State | Literacy Rate (2001 Census) | Library Legislation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Andhra Pradesh | 61.11 | Yes |
| 2 | Arunachal Pradesh | 54.74 | No |
| 3 | Assam | 64.28 | No |
| 4 | Bihar | 47.53 | Yes |
| 5 | Chaatisgarh | 65.18 | Yes |
| 6 | Delhi | 81.82 | No |
| 7 | Goa | 82.32 | Yes |
| 8 | Gujarat | 69.97 | Yes |
| 9 | Haryana | 68.59 | Yes |
| 10 | Himachal Pradesh | 77.13 | No |
| 11 | Jammu & Kashmir | 54.46 | No |
| 12 | Jharkhand | 54.13 | No |
| 13 | Karnataka | 67.04 | Yes |
| 14 | Kerala | 90.92 | Yes |
| 15 | Madhya Pradesh | 64.11 | No |
| 16 | Maharastra | 77.27 | Yes |
| 17 | Manipur | 68.87 | Yes |
| 18 | Meghalaya | 63.31 | No |
| 19 | Mizoram | 88.49 | Yes |
| 20 | Nagaland | 67.11 | No |
| 21 | Orissa | 63.61 | Yes |
| 22 | Punjab | 69.95 | No |
| 23 | Rajasthan | 61.03 | Yes |
| 24 | Sikkim | 69.68 | No |
| 25 | Tamil Nadu | 73.47 | Yes |
| 26 | Tripura | 73.66 | No |
| 27 | Uttar Pradesh | 57.36 | Yes |
| 28 | Uttaranchal | 72.28 | Yes |
| 29 | West Bengal | 69.22 | Yes |

The above table indicates the states that have enacted Public Libraries Act as well as the states which are yet to enact such Acts. This Table also indicates that large number of states does not have Public Libraries Acts, including densely populated states, such as Madhya Pradesh,

Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. All states of the south region have Public Libraries Act, and they have literacy rate above the national average. Although, some states as such have no Public Libraries Act, these states have government-funded public libraries at the state and district levels; government aided public libraries at the rural and urban areas are mostly absent or having in an unorganized manner. There is also provision of training of public librarians in the Public Libraries Act in some states, in the forms of orientation training, refresher training. The public librarians should be aware of recent development in information sources and information systems, especially in the digital environment, as many public libraries worldwide are providing web-based library and information services to their users. Digital divide in the India can be bridged significantly if they make use of computers and Internet technologies in the public libraries at the grass-root level. The users of public libraries then will have access to digital information available through Internet to keep abreast of recent development in their areas of interest. Information literacy competency development programmes for public librarians and users need to be a part of provisions in the Public Libraries Act of the states.

## FEMALE LITERACY IN INDIA

According to last census held in 2001, the percentage of female literacy in the country is 54.16%. The literacy rate in the country has increased from 18.33% in 1951 to 65.38% as per 2001 census. The female literacy rate has also increased from 8.86 % in 1951 to 54.16%. It is noticed that the female literacy rate during the period 1991-2001 increased by 14.87% whereas male literacy rate rose by 11.72%. Hence the female literacy actually increased by 3.15% more compared to male literacy rate.

## FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR POOR FEMALE LITERACY RATE

Historically, a variety of factors have been found to be responsible for poor female literate, viz

i.   Gender based inequality

ii   Social discrimination and economic exploitation

iii. Occupation of girl child in domestic chores

iv.  Low enrolment of girls in schools

v.   Low retention rate and high dropout rate

The main strategies adopted by the Government for increasing female literacy in the country include: National Literacy Mission for imparting functional literacy, Universalisation for Elementary Education and Non Formal Education.

## CONTRIBUTION OF LITERACY CAMPAIGNS TO FEMALE LITERACY

The provision of educational opportunities for women has been an important part of the national endeavor in the field of education since India's Independence. Though these endeavors id yield significant results, gender disparity persists with uncompromising tenacity, more so in the rural areas and among the disadvantaged communities. This is not only a matter of national anxiety and concern but also a matter of national conscience. It is with this concern that the Government of India launched the National Literacy Mission in 1988 for eradication of adult illiteracy. Since women account for an overwhelming percentage of the total number of illiterates, the National Literacy Mission is for all practical purposes a Mission of imparting functional literacy to women. Total literacy campaigns launched since 1988 under the aegis of the National emphasis on making efforts to

i.   create an environment where women demand knowledge and information, empowering themselves to change their lives.

ii.  Inculcate in women the confidence thatchange is possible, if women work collectively.

iii. Spread the message that education of women is pre-condition for fightining against their oppression.

iv. Highlight the plight of the girl child and stress the need for Universalisation of elementary education as a way of addressing the issue.

Some of the significant ways in which the literacy campaigns have contributed to the promotion of female literacy and women's empowerment are as follows:-

## HEIGHTENED SOCIAL AWARENESS

Literacy campaigns have heightened social awareness among women regarding the importance of education, both for themselves as well as for their children. Large numbers of women have been participating whole-heartedly in the literacy campaigns as learners and volunteers. Because of the campaign mode and creation of a positive environment for literacy, women receive a social sanction to participate in the literacy programs. As women came out of their homes and take part in the campaigns with great enthusiasm, they acquire a heightened sense of self-awareness and desire to gain knowledge of host of women's issues.

## INCREASED SCHOOL ENROLMENT

The literacy campaigns have also motivated and encouraged women learners to educate their children, particularly girls by enrolling them in formal schools. An evaluation study of the literacy campaign ion Birbhum District shows that the biggest achievement of the adult literacy program in Birbhum has been its impact on girls' education. The confidence of the girls, as they perform drill or play football, is the result of the awareness among neo-literate parents that girls need to be educated and outgoing. The need to provide equal opportunity to both girls and boys has also had effect of generating greater demand for the quantity to both girls and boys has also had effect of generating greater demand for the quantity and quality of primary schooling.

## INCREASE IN SELF-CONFIDENCE AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

The literacy classes conducted under literacy campaigns have given women as opportunity to break the isolation which is socially structured into their lives, giving them a chance to meet other women and learn collectively- rather than learn singly as individuals. The newly acquired literacy skills have enhanced their ability to solve family problems and learn new skills. Women are communicating how they have started feeling more confident, how their articulation has improved, how they have become more discerning and how they have learnt to function autonomously.

## GENDER EQUITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Total literacy campaigns have provided illiterate adult women, who have been denied access to formal schooling, with a great opportunity for reading, writing, increasing awareness levels and skills training. Literacy campaigns have thus actively promoted gender equity and have sought to empower them as to decision making about themselves, their families and their communities. The impact of literacy on women's life has often been dramatic. Experiences of Pudukottai in Tamil Nadu (where women learnt how to bicycle and acquired ownership right in stone quarries) and Nellore in Andhra Pradesh (where a lesson in the literacy Primer inspired women to launch anti-arrack agitation that later engulfed the entire district and the state) have shown how women have been empowered at individual and collective levels as a result of their participation.

## STATUS IN THE FAMILY

Literacy campaigns have played a significant role in improving the status of women within their won families. Whereas traditionally, women have little say in the family decision making, they, through participation in literacy

programs, have begun to express their newly found self-belief in having say both within and without the family.

## EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY

Another area in which women's equality has shown a major improvement as a result of adult literacy programs is the area of enrolment of boys and girls in schools. As a result of higher participation of women in literacy campaigns, the gender gap in literacy levels is gradually getting reduced. Even more significant is the fact that disparity in enrolment of boys and girls in neo-literate households is much lowered compared to the non-literate householders.

## HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS AND ACCESS TO CREDIT

In almost all the districts, the literacy campaigns have gone beyond the transaction of mere literacy skills and have served to enhance knowledge and skills for better management of expenditure and improving earning capacities. In several districts, the women participants in literacy campaigns have begun to set aside their earnings not only in regular banks but also in specially thrift societies. Such societies, as for example in Dumka are run by the women themselves.

## HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Literacy campaigns in most districts have taken up health and hygiene issues as an integral component of adult education programs. Literacy campaigns have helped to spread knowledge about health care and nutrition, thereby enabling mothers to keep their family in better health and to care better for their children. Literacy campaigns have also disseminated information for creating awareness about problems of early marriage, spacing and small family norms.

## INITIATIVES FOR PROMOTING THE INFORMATION LITERACY ACTIVITIES

In this new paradigm, priority is given to analytical skills; that is, to the ability to seek and find information, crystallize issues, formulate testable hypotheses, marshal and evaluate evidence, and solve problems at hand. The new competencies that employers value in the Knowledge Society have to do with oral and written communication, teamwork, peer teaching, creativity, envisioning skills, resourcefulness and the ability to adjust to change. Many of these competencies involve social, human and inter-cultural skills that are not normally taught in science or technology based disciplines. Information literacy training is collaboration between the teachers, media persons, computer technologies and librarians. The e-governance initiatives undertaken throughout India, its services and positive benefits that the rural citizens can get from these programs require good publicity. In order to teach them skills required for realizing a information/service need, and developing the skills necessary to find, evaluate and use that information/service through these initiatives should be taught for the proper and effective utilization. To make India a Knowledge Society, people from all walks of life need to contribute towards the upliftment and proper implementation of the concept of Information Literacy and lifelong learning. Government of India along with the State Governments and other competent organizations and professional bodies need to undertake some of the programs/ initiatives that are and needs to be implemented and practiced.

1. to implement Information Literacy programs to users of the all types of libraries

2. to integrate Information Literacy across the Curriculum at all levels of education

3. University Grants Commission (UGC) may take the proper steps to induct the component of Information Literacy in higher education, so also the related bodies in engineering and other profession courses. In addition, the professional societies, academics and associations like ILA, IASLIC and IATLIS can make efforts to bring

together the professional expertise along with academic and media experts to design and develop the viable Curriculum for various levels of education

4. to collaborate teachers, librarians and media experts to design and promote Information Literacy programs

5. to form a National Information Literacy Forum to enable people from all walks of life to interact, discuss and bring out policy guidelines to strengthen the Information Literacy movement across the country

6. to conduct programs like training the trainer in order to upgrade the Information Literacy knowledge and skills of both librarians and faculty

## CONCLUSION

We live in a very complex and often overwhelming information age. Information Centres, library, and education organizations have a responsibility to do our best to help people succeed. Our job is to meet people's information needs. Providing information is one way that libraries seek to meet needs. The other way is to teach and provide facilitate to learn.

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