Literacy in India

Posted at: 16/07/2025

Literacy in India: Status, Schemes, and the Road Ahead

Context:

Tripura has recently attained the status of a **"fully literate state"**, based on data from the **Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society (ULLAS)** – *Nav Bharat Saksharta Karyakram*. This achievement highlights India's progress in improving literacy, especially in the northeastern region, and aligns with the broader national goals of **inclusive and equitable education**.

What is Literacy?

- As per the **ULLAS programme**, literacy is defined as the *ability to read, write, and perform basic arithmetic with comprehension*, along with **critical life skills** like digital and financial literacy.

- According to the **Office of the Registrar General of India**, a **literate person** is someone **aged 7 years and above** who can read and write with understanding in **any language**.

Status of Literacy in India (2023-24)

- **India's total literacy rate**: 80.9%

- **Top states by literacy rate**:

    - **Goa** – **99.72%**

    - **Mizoram** – **98.2%**

- ○ **Kerala** – **96.2%**

- ○ **Tripura** – **95.6%**

- **States with lowest literacy rates**:

  - ○ **Andhra Pradesh** – **72.6%**

  - ○ **Bihar** – **74.3%**

Major Government Measures to Promote Literacy

- **Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009**
  Ensures *free and compulsory education* for children aged **6–14 years**, sets **minimum standards** for schools, and prohibits *discrimination and corporal punishment*.

- **National Education Policy (NEP), 2020**

  - ○ Emphasizes **foundational literacy and numeracy**.

  - ○ Promotes **multilingualism**, **vocational training**, and **digital education**.

  - ○ Focuses on **21st-century skills** and **holistic development**.

- **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan**
  An umbrella programme integrating:

  - ○ **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**

  - ○ **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA)**

  - ○ **Teacher Education (TE)**

- **PM SHRI Schools (2022)**

  - ○ Aims to upgrade **14,500 schools** as model institutions to demonstrate NEP implementation.

- Covers government and local body-run **elementary to senior secondary schools**.

- **DIKSHA Platform**

    - Offers **digital resources** for teachers and students.

    - Supports **blended learning** and **teacher training**.

- **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao**

    - Promotes **education of the girl child**.

    - Addresses **gender-based educational disparities**.

- **PM Vidyalakshmi Scheme**

    - Provides **collateral-free loans** for students entering **Quality Higher Education Institutions (QHEIs)**.

    - Removes **financial barriers** to higher education.

Effectiveness of Educational Initiatives

- **Literacy improvement**:

    - From **14% in 1947** to **80.9% in 2023-24**.

- **Reading ability among Class 3 students**:

    - **23.4%** could read Class 2-level text in 2024, up from **16.3% in 2022**.

- **Arithmetic skills**:

    - Notable improvement seen across both **government** and **private** schools.

- **Preschool enrolments (age 3–5)**:

- Increased in **2024** compared to **2018** and **2022**, reflecting NEP's focus on **Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)**.

Key Challenges in Achieving Higher Literacy

- **Social exclusion**:

  - Marginalized groups face **limited access** due to **caste, gender, and poverty**.

- **Regional disparities**:

  - Large gaps exist between **urban and rural**, **private and public**, and **state-wise education quality**.

- **High dropout rates**:

  - Caused by **poverty, child labour, poor infrastructure**, and **lack of support services**.

- **Teacher-related issues**:

  - **Shortages**, **uneven qualifications**, and **lack of training** affect quality.

- **Administrative inefficiencies**:

  - **Bureaucratic delays** hinder timely implementation of schemes.

Way Forward

- **Curriculum restructuring** to make learning more **practical, skill-based, and inclusive**.

- Focus on **interactive, tech-enabled** education tailored to the **needs of diverse learners**.

- Promote **community participation**, **digital equity**, and **teacher empowerment** to close the existing gaps.