

FAMILY, RELIGION, PEDAGOGY AND EVERYDAY EDUCATION PRACTICE

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THE DYNAMICS OF ILLITERACY FORMATION IN INDIA¹

ABSTRACT:

India is one of the fastest growing countries in the world. At the same time, there are 272,700,941 illiterate people in India, most of whom are marginalized by factors such as poverty, gender, disability, and caste. Children are often forgotten, remaining invisible in the strictly hierarchical Indian society. Access to education reserved for the highest castes has led to marginalization of the lowest castes, especially untouchable Dalits. This paper deals with illiteracy in India, its causes and the barriers to overcoming it that lie within the society. The aim is to inform the reader about the problem of discrimination in education which leads to illiteracy.

KEYWORDS:

illiteracy, India, education, Dalits, educational policy

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CASTES, RELIGIONS AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE IN INDIA

Access to education, restricted over the centuries to the highest castes, has led to the isolation of some sections of society from learning and has deprived them of influence on its development. Castes still determine the social order today, although officially they have been abolished². The word *caste* comes from Portuguese and means *species*. Indian society is divided into four *varnas* (castes): Brahmins, knights, merchants and farmers, servants, and untouchables so-called Dalits, who are outside the caste system. According to the interpretation of Rigveda, each caste is formed from a corresponding part of the body of a cosmic person, Purusha, which determines their relationship to ritual and the nature of the activities of daily life.

The duty of a Brahmin, growing out of the mouth of Purusha, is to study and perform ritual functions combined with a magical influence on the minds, emotions, and imagination of the members of other castes. Their tasks included learning the truth and teaching, as well as putting into practice the thoughts of the sages. The caste of Kshatriyas, knights and rulers, who protected the land and welfare arose from the arm of Parusha. The studies of the Kshatriyas were functional in nature and prepared them for governance and warfare. In matters of understanding the laws of life, they sought advice from Brahmins, who explained the regularities and ways of fulfilling dharma³. The Vaishya caste, which arose from the hips of Parusha, led a life of economy, craftsmanship and agriculture, and regenerated itself educationally. The fourth caste, the Shudras, arose from the legs of Parusha and performed subservient work⁴.

The sacred books contain rules to help maintain the ancient social order, and those related to marriage are the foundation of the caste system. Mixed unions are prohibited and marriages are arranged by parents. Intra-caste endogamy is the foundation of the entire social order. In the old days, Buddhism and Jainism undermined the caste order and

² See H. Mystek-Pałka, "Edukacja dorosłych w Indiach", [in:] *Edukacja dorosłych w wybranych krajach pozaeuropejskich*, ed. A. Frąckowiak, J. Półturzycki, Warszawa 2011, p. 320.

³ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore – poszukiwanie prawdy i piękna w teorii i praktyce wychowania*, Warszawa 1990, p. 39.

⁴ See *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, ed. Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski, Warszawa 2004, p. 83.

endogamy, but now politicians want to reduce social inequality by guaranteeing certain privileges to underprivileged groups. In the nineteen twenties, the British authorities began to enrol the lowest castes and tribes on special official lists in order to include them in the welfare program. From this period also come their names, such as oppressed castes, or scheduled castes⁵.

The most abhorrent element of the caste system is the practice of untouchability, which covers about one-sixth of the Indian population. In addition to Dalits, also known as pariahs, children of God⁶, India's tribal people have also suffered persecution from society. The Indian government has been fighting against caste-based discrimination. Numerous penalties have been imposed on those who discriminate against others; however, there are many reservations about their effectiveness⁷.

The system of preferential treatment for members of the castes who occupied the lowest positions in the hierarchy in the traditional society has led to the phenomenon of positive discrimination. People from the list of scheduled castes and tribes are provided with reservations in schools, universities and government jobs, both at the local and central level. In addition to this, the scheduled castes are covered by the social and financial assistance system, they are given additional scholarships and free dormitories. In practice, widespread corruption and nepotism effectively limit the use of these privileges, especially for those who really need such help, i.e. the poorest and least educated⁸.

The underprivileged classes, who hitherto had no chance of social advancement, constitute 30% of India's population. The Scheduled castes constitute about 40% of this category, or 15% of the total Indian population. Scheduled tribes, or 7% of the population, account for 20% of this category⁹. The use of group identities reveals one of the paradoxes of

⁵ See P. Łodziński, *W dążeniu do równości*, Warszawa 1993, p. 95.

⁶ Mahatma Gandhi called the untouchables Harijans, or children of God, which they didn't like and the name basically didn't catch on.

⁷ See D. Jakubowska, R. Rydzewski, "Prawo a rzeczywistość-współczesna sytuacja Dalitów w Delhi", [in:], *Indie w XXI wieku. Wybrane problemy*, ed. A. Potyrała, M. Skobrtala, Poznań 2009, p. 82.

⁸ See M. Browarczyk, "Wybrane aspekty sytuacji kobiet w Indiach współczesnych", [in:] *Międzykulturowe i interdyscyplinarne badania feministyczne. Daleki – Bliski Wschód: współczesność i prehistoria*, ed. E. Pakszys, Poznań 2005, p. 68.

⁹ See P. Łodziński, *W dążeniu do równości*, op. cit., p. 144.

egalitarian Indian government policy. On the one hand, it seeks to abolish inequalities based on caste, while on the other hand, the use of caste identifications in positive discrimination policies helps sustain traditional social divisions. It pays to be untouchable and to pass this identification on to future generations so that they can enjoy preferential treatment¹⁰. In the name of egalitarianism of the masses, the fundamental principle of equal start is being questioned, regardless of race, caste, religion or wealth status¹¹.

In Indian society, Brahmins have achieved the highest progress in higher education. According to the researchers, this is related to the original axiom that people are not equal. Education has been and remains one of the means of maintaining social divisions, creating a distinctly hierarchical structure in line with the classical caste division. Today this fact is cited as one of the reasons for the mass illiteracy of Indians¹².

The school system in India reflects the country's linguistic diversity, which facilitates education in regional and ethnic languages. There are about 800 indigenous languages called native languages in use, along with about 1,700 dialects, from four language groups: Indo-European, Dravidian, Austroasiatic and Sino-Tibetan. Hindi is the official language, while English is the so-called auxiliary language¹³. The largest languages in terms of number of speakers are Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Kannada, Malayam, Oriya, Punjabi, Adamic and Maithili¹⁴. In each state, there is an official state language and education is provided in the state language, English or Hindi, i.e. it has a trilingual form of instruction. As a rule, states where the official language is Hindi do not teach a third language. The roots of this system can be traced back to the beginnings of the Indian state, as colonial India was divided into principalities and provinces, which were not linguistically homogeneous.

Followers of different religions live within one country: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, as well as Sikhs, Christians and Jews. Each of

¹⁰ See *ibidem*, p. 197.

¹¹ See P. Tokarski, P. Bhutani, *Nowoczesne Indie. Wyzwania rozwoju*, Warszawa 2007, p. 138.

¹² See K. Dębnicki, *Konflikt i przemoc w systemie politycznym niepodległych Indii*, Warszawa 2006, p. 102.

¹³ See K. Mylius, *Historia literatury staroindyjskiej*, transl. L. Żylicz, Warszawa 2004, p. 16.

¹⁴ See M. Skorbtal, "Różnorodność językowa a federalizm w Indiach", [in:] *Indie w XXI wieku*, op. cit., p. 46.

these groups follows distinct customs and traditions. The traditional Hindu social structure is very viable and at the same time absorbs new castes, creating 'Hindu Christians' from Christians and 'Hindu Muslims' from Muslims. There is still a division between Muslims who came to India with the invading armies and who considered themselves superior for that reason, and the local converts, who usually came from the lower Hindu castes. The converts largely retained parts of the Hindu tradition, which either survived intact or were partly adapted to the requirements of the new religion.

Indian Islam is very much permeated with Hindu elements, Sufi Muslims are close to Indian yogis, and the Bhakti movement contains many elements from Islam. The system of social stratification among Muslims also resembles the caste system characteristic of Hindus, but Muslim groups are less strict with their followers. Hindu-Muslim marriages are prohibited from a religious point of view. A similar phenomenon is observed among Hindu Christians.

Christianity was usually adopted by representatives of the lowest castes, and they were attracted to the new religion by egalitarianism and association with the ruling class of India's British. In fact, the newly converted Christians have retained the division into 4 varnas, and the Catholics have their own churches¹⁵. Sikhism emerged in the 15th century as a synthesis of religious and social concepts of Islam and Hinduism. By the end of the 17th century they had evolved into a distinct religious group and had become a warrior group nurturing soldierly qualities, and were so regarded first by Moguls and then by the British, who enlisted them particularly readily for military service¹⁶.

In 2011 India was inhabited by 1,051,404,094 people¹⁷. In a few decades, India's population has grown from 345 million to over one billion. This has been due to several factors, including reduced infant mortality from 146 to 110 per thousand and increased life expectancy from 26 years to 64. Despite the increase in population density, India is still not urbanized, with only 28% of the population living in urban areas. With higher levels of urbanization comes the phenomenon of slums, unheard of in Eastern cities; in Mumbai alone, half of the population live there.

¹⁵ See K. Dębicki, *Konflikt i przemoc w systemie politycznym niepodległych Indii*, op. cit. p. 73.

¹⁶ See *ibidem*, p.157.

¹⁷ <http://censusindia.gov.in>, access: 20.03.2012.

The position of women in India varies from region to region. This is because in the most economically backward regions, the influence of patriarchy and Muslim culture is more persistent. The northern states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are the most backward, while Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in the south are the most developed¹⁸. A particular feature of India's demographic profile is the scarcity of women. There are 933 women for every 1,000 men. The shortage of women is the result of actions taken by the Hindu ranging from infanticide to neglecting and murdering young daughter-in-laws. Abortions due to sex determination during prenatal screening have increased in recent years. In 1994, parliament passed an act banning abortions based on the sex of the foetus, but with widespread corruption, such legislation will not put a stop to the practice¹⁹. The birth of a daughter is a burden on the parents, they cannot afford dowry while marrying their daughters off.

Female illiteracy is another indicator of their neglect in Indian society. According to the 2001 census, about 46% of women were illiterate. Life in a traditional Indian village does not encourage girls to study, and the education of a daughter or daughter-in-law is considered unnecessary. Sons are the desired offspring, as parents expect from them support in old age²⁰. The south of India, matriarchal, uses contraception successfully and has a lower female mortality rate. In the north, a stronghold of patriarchy, girls as young as ten are married off only to bear children until they succeed in giving birth to a son. It is the patriarchal view of women as bearers of children, without allowing them to have contraception as they wish, that is a big obstacle to family planning²¹.

Child marriage, which is forbidden by law, is still practiced in India because poor families then have little or no need to accumulate a dowry. Marriage before sexual maturity provides a guarantee of 'purity'. The

¹⁸ See M. Browarczyk, "Wybrane aspekty sytuacji kobiet w Indiach współczesnych", [in:] *Międzykulturowe i interdyscyplinarne badania feministyczne. Daleki – Bliski Wschód: współczesność i prehistoria*, ed. E. Pakszys, Poznań 2005, p. 65.

¹⁹ See *ibidem*, p. 71.

²⁰ As life expectancy increases, so does the number of people requiring care in old age. At present, India has little in common with the welfare state, it is not affected by the problem of pensions for the elderly.

²¹ See D. Rothermund, *Indie. Nowa azjatycka potęga*, transl. A. Tarnowska, E. Tarnowska, M. Zwoliński, Warszawa 2010, p. 216.

patriarchal system not only promotes the restriction of women's rights and the subordination of their will and power to men, it also glorifies the excellence and virtue of women who remain single. This is not for the benefit of women, but for the benefit of the family, especially its male members. The enforced isolation of girls and women, the veiling of the face and figure, and submission to norms set by men are still a symbol of honour and a status marker not only for themselves, but for the entire family. Women's sexuality is controlled and protected from an early age by men who are related to women²². To this day, a remnant of *parda* can be seen in Rajasthan²³, women there cover their faces and heads with a wide scarf or a sari seam²⁴.

In the 1980s, a middle class emerged as a result of India's rapid development. The very idea of it was new in India; before the era of colonization, its alternative was the *jati*, the indigenously Indian concept of caste. The evolution of middle classes indicates their increasing participation in India's economy and politics²⁵. The size of the middle class is estimated at 150-250 million people. Three subgroups can be distinguished from this group: the first, living just above the subsistence level, can afford very little. This includes teachers and small businessmen. The new middle class, which includes educated city dwellers and landowners, is in the middle. The third, upper layer, includes businessmen, industrialists, who make up only 1% of society. The middle class is divided into the old 'national' class and the new class. The old class, created during Nehru's time, is made up of old-school freedom fighters who look up to the model of the British gentleman. Most often they are doctors, lawyers, lecturers and work in the state administration. They speak mainly English²⁶. Women are not very mobile, the control imposed by the family is quite

²² See A. Sieklucka, "Równouprawnienie kobiet w sikhizmie", [in:] *Być kobietą w Orientcie*, ed. D. Chmielowska, B. Grabowska, E. Machut-Mendecka, Warszawa 2008, p. 82.

²³ *Parda* – a Muslim custom of seclusion for women, which from the 16th century onwards was accepted as a mark of social prestige by the upper classes of society, including the followers of Hinduism. Women lived in a separate part of the household and their contact with the outside world was very limited and strictly controlled by male family members. *Parda*, from Persian literally means veil.

²⁴ See M. Browarczyk, "Wybrane aspekty sytuacji kobiet w Indiach współczesnych", *op. cit.*, p. 67, 83.

²⁵ See P. Tokarski, P. Bhutani, *Nowoczesne Indie*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

²⁶ See D. Rothermund, *Indie*, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

high due to the restrictive desire to maintain the caste purity²⁷. The new middle class is more modern, women have stepped out of the shadow of their husbands and earn a living for themselves, have their own income, are more mobile, and change partners more often. Families where both spouses work often hire servants to help out, and the wealthiest provide housing at their residence. Social status symbols in India include a cell phone, a computer, a scooter and finally a car. Unfortunately, one of the main objects of middle class consumption is the labour of the poor.

In India, a minimum number of calories consumed has been adopted as the criterion for determining the poverty line since 1962. The poorest states include: Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, while the richest states are: Haryana, Punjab, Kerala, Gujarat, and Himachal Pradesh. Attempts to define poverty focus primarily on physical viability and do not take into account illiteracy, for example. The Indian poor make up 30% of the population, are illiterate, and have a daily income of \$0.43. At the same time, they are a powerful source of cheap labor. A striking manifestation of the urban poor are the huge slums disfiguring India's cities²⁸. Having children is sometimes considered by the poor as gaining extra hands to work, which can bring additional income to the family. Girls between the ages of 5 and 11 take over most of the household chores that customarily belong to women's activities: cooking, cleaning, caring for younger siblings, carrying water or firewood, chores in the fields. Their work goes unnoticed because their mothers do not see these activities as work. Children are employed in big numbers to carry out such activities as: making paper bags, ornaments, carpets, matches, cigarettes, collecting rags and selling newspapers. They often work at home making incense sticks, cakes, or assist their mothers in making various items. The poor perform specific low-paid, unskilled, menial jobs with no opportunity for change or advancement. The lack of educational opportunities, the lack of prospects for a better job and for a change in their life situation drives girls and boys into the vicious circle of poverty²⁹.

²⁷ See M. Browarczyk, "Wybrane aspekty sytuacji kobiet w Indiach współczesnych", op. cit., p. 77.

²⁸ See D. Rothermund, *Indie*, op. cit., p. 254.

²⁹ See M. Browarczyk, "Wybrane aspekty sytuacji kobiet w Indiach współczesnych", op. cit., p. 75.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN INDIA BEFORE 1947

In the traditional model of teaching, the main centre of learning was the gurukul. The student lived with his guru's family for many years. A large part of his learning consisted of memorizing the holy texts. When a student became a teacher himself, he passed on his knowledge to the next student and thus participated in the guruparampara. The language of instruction was Sanskrit, a sacred language not understood by most Indians. The philosophical treatises, the Upanishads, were the basis for the training and education of the Brahmins. They studied them and imparted knowledge to the lower castes. The most famous university of the time was located in Naimisha and educated ten thousand students. Such education was reserved for a limited group, but it allowed Indian culture to survive for centuries³⁰.

Hindu religion is characterized by a belief in the repeatability of the cycles of creation of the world and the concept of a birth: the first birth is the birth of a child into the world, the second time a person is born through initiation, and the third time he or she is born after death, in a new incarnation, according to the rule of karma. The conviction of the soul wandering and its new incarnations puts the whole Indian upbringing in a different context, unfamiliar to European reflection on human upbringing. It is associated with the theory of merit and transmigration, a symbolic circle of a series of new incarnations, which provide the possibility of spiritual maturation of man. The birth of a child is identified with chaos, lack of discipline and life on a biological level. During childhood, a person lives surrounded by unconditional love, often under the care of servants, free from educational interventions and directing pressures. The child, like the natural world, develops even though no one directs this process. Its existence until initiation is devoid of social and religious status. The child ends its existence as a natural human being when passing from nature into the world of tradition and spiritual life at the age of eight³¹.

The Indo-Islamic system, which was initiated by Mahmud of Ghazni and brought to its full flowering by Emperor Akbar, was a great

³⁰ See *Pedagogika*, op. cit., p. 83.

³¹ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath*, op. cit.

synthesis of Islamic and Hindu thought, the equivalent of cooperation between Muslims and Hindus in the fields of language, literature, painting, architecture, and religion. The institutions of madrasa and Koranic school were introduced, which focused on imparting religious knowledge exclusively to boys.

However, when the British took control of India, the country's education system was not organised in any systematic way and was extremely elitist. Hindus and Muslims had their own separate schools, closely related to their religion³². The model of education introduced by the British created a new elite. Colleges, government or missionary, run by various church organizations, became the centres of education established by the colonizers. The first college based on European standards was established by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1817. The language of instruction was English. The main problem for Indians was the introduction of discipline into schools, which Indians were not used to. Benches, exams, precisely timed classes, and an all-knowing teacher were all unknown in traditional gurukul-based Hindu education. British teachers sought to educate Hindu students about the cultural models that they themselves had inherited from their ancestors. Thus, these were not Hindu but European models, often not understood or internalized by the students.

The traditional model of education was based on encyclopaedic knowledge that the student had to acquire and on cultural transmission, without confronting it with current economic, social or political issues. The British Crown needed clerks and lower-level functionaries who could become their instrument in managing the Indian empire. There was no need to train scientists or engineers, and typically general humanistic knowledge was sufficient for the British administration. In 1857, the universities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras were founded. These were branches of British universities, and the standardized curriculum was adapted to the requirements of the University of London. Thus, no educational system was established in India, and the British made no effort to distinguish between the method of education in Britain and outside Britain within the empire. Nor did the British see the need for elementary schools. Parents wishing to educate their children

³² See K. Dębnicki, *Konflikt i przemoc w systemie politycznym niepodległych Indii*, op. cit.

hired private teachers. The British administration did not want to spend money on primary education and did nothing regarding this matter until the end of its reign³³.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN INDIA AFTER 1947

After 1947 the Indian educational system came under the influence of contradictory trends. On the one hand, there was the legacy of the past, i.e. casteism and educational inequalities created during the colonial period. On the other hand, education was at the center of the egalitarian social aspirations of Indians. After 1947, the vision of building the infrastructure of a society based on knowledge was born. Already just before the liberation, the development of education was part of the Gandhian ethos. In the 1950s, preferential schemes were created for the lowest castes and tribes. The constitution statutorily guaranteed certain privileges to the 'underprivileged groups' such as pools of seats in primary, secondary and higher education, scholarships, food and dormitories, and a guarantee of posts in the public sector³⁴. Compulsory primary education for children up to the age of 11 was introduced in independent India, and governments have often published impressive statistics on school attendance. According to the National Policy of Education launched in 1986, 6% of GDP was to be spent on education. In 2003, spending on education accounted for only 3.5% of GDP³⁵.

Education in India is characterized by a significant degree of elitism. Financial outlays for education are directed primarily as grants to private schools and elite government institutions and to secondary and higher education, rather than to mass primary education. In India today, spending on higher and secondary education, from which at most 30% of the population benefit, consumes as much as 60% of all education expenditures. The best institutions include private schools run by nuns or monks, educational societies, language minorities, ethnic and caste groups, private entrepreneurs and sponsors. These schools

³³ See J. Justyński, *Mysł społeczna i polityczna renesansu indyjskiego od Rama Mohana Roya do Rabindranatha Tagora*, Warszawa 1985, p. 254.

³⁴ See Z. Krawczyk, *Rabindranath Tagore*, op. cit.

³⁵ See D. Rothermund, *Indie*, op. cit., p. 226.

initially teach in Hindi, on the premise that it is easier for children to absorb information in the language they have spoken since birth. Later, they gradually switch to English, which is then used to teach all subjects from the sixth grade onwards³⁶. The cultural divisions of Indian society can be observed in the diversity of schools within the private sector. Schools group students and teachers from specific communities, which contributes to perpetuating traditional social divisions and segmenting Indian society. Private schooling has been and will continue to be for the most affluent and socially mobile groups, and the cultural exclusivity makes it inaccessible to the rest of society³⁷.

In 2009, the Indian Parliament made it mandatory for the state to provide all Indian children with a place in school. The right to education was given to children who had never attended school, some due to insufficient parental interest in this matter, others due to lack of school space. In poorer, overcrowded districts or villages, the school network is inadequate and children have difficulty enrolling. They often do not have the documents required by school authorities, for instance only due to the fact that they were born in a place where no one issued birth certificates³⁸. A characteristic feature of the poorest social groups is their high school dropout rate – over three times higher than among children from higher castes – and second-rate education. The main reason for this is the attitude of parents who expect their children to become productive as soon as possible and bring income to the family. They treat education as a waste of time and an unproductive investment³⁹.

The level of education in free elementary school is very low. There are no qualified teachers, no teaching aids, no electricity, no toilets, no study rooms, or water to drink. Most children do not pass the state exams, many have retakes, so they are automatically disqualified and marginalized from society. Primary education has been affected by a high percentage of children dropping out of school after only a few grades, or repeating the same grade for many years before finally dropping out and feeding the army of cheap, uneducated labour or the

³⁶ See M. Skakuj-Puri, *Życie codzienne w Delhi*, Warszawa 2011.

³⁷ See P. Łodziński, *W dążeniu do równości*, op. cit., p. 189.

³⁸ Government of India, *Economic Survey 2010*.

³⁹ See P. Łodziński, *W dążeniu do równości*, op. cit., p. 146.

unemployed. It was 73% in the 1990s and dropped to 31% in 2003, largely influenced by the introduction of free meals in all schools⁴⁰.

The gap between official government rhetoric and actual policy is intriguing. The constitution recommends the introduction of compulsory primary education, but child labour has not been abolished. Politicians call it a sad necessity; according to experts, children work in every third family and the income generated by minors accounts for 20% of India's GDP. The rule that children under the age of fourteen should not be employed has no bearing on reality. It is common to employ children in service even below the age of ten⁴¹.

THE PHENOMENON OF ILLITERACY IN INDIA

According to the UNESCO definition, an illiterate person is someone who is unable to read, write and understand a short, simple text concerning his or her everyday life and is at least 15 years old. A functional illiterate is someone who has attended school and has even learned something, but has never mastered the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic in everyday life. Only when forced to work, due to lack of these competencies, he or she finds himself or herself on the margins of society and is at the highest risk of unemployment, which in turn leads to poverty, slum life and greater loss of health. Functional illiteracy is seen as a problem in countries that require more and more competencies due to technological advances⁴².

According to UNESCO statistics, there are currently about 950 million men and women in the world who have not mastered the elementary cultural skills of reading and writing. Even more frightening is the fact that over 135 million children do not attend school, and over 60% of them are girls. By comparison, the illiteracy rate in Poland is 0.7%, in Brazil 10%, in Thailand 6%, in China 6.7%, in Vietnam 9.7%, in Egypt 43.6%, in India 44%. This puts the country almost at the bottom of the list of 182 countries where illiteracy levels among the population over 15 years of age have been surveyed⁴³.

⁴⁰ See D. Rothermund, *Indie*, op. cit., p. 226.

⁴¹ See K. Dębicki, *Konflikt i przemoc w systemie politycznym niepodległych Indii*, op. cit., p. 101.

⁴² See B. Śliwerski, "UNESCO o analfabetyzmie", *Edukacja i Dialog* 2010, no. 1.

⁴³ Government of India, *Economic Survey* 2010, p. 271.

Table 1. Illiteracy rate in years 1951–2018⁴⁴

Year	Total	Men	Women
1951	82,0	73,0	92,0
1961	72,0	60,0	85,0
1971	66,0	55,0	79,0
1981	57,0	45,0	71,0
1991	48,0	35,0	61,0
2001	35,0	25,0	47,0
2011	26,0	18,0	35,0
2017–2018	22,3	15,3	29,7

Source: Census of India, Provisional Population Totals, India 2011, p. 102; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, National Statistical Office, Household Social Consumption: Education in India as part of the 75th round of National Sample Survey – from July 2017 to June 2018, New Delhi 2019, p. 11⁴⁵.

In 1951, only 8% of women and 27% of men in India could write and read. In 1960, universal education was made compulsory for all children up to the age of 14 pursuant to the Constitution. The vast majority of illiterate people in India come from the lowest income families living in rural areas. Poverty, the need to support the family, lack of funds for children's education, and working since childhood are the main reasons for not attending school (self-selection) or starting school late, skipping classes, second-rate or dropping out altogether after two to three years of elementary school. The highest absenteeism from school occurs during

⁴⁴ Researchers in India, compiling a report on illiteracy in the country, adopt a different definition of an illiterate person from the one adopted by UNESCO. According to their definition, an illiterate person is a person who cannot read or write and is older than 7 years. This definition makes it possible to include in the statistics all school-age children who are enrolled in compulsory education, but who do not start school. This, in the opinion of the researchers, gives a much clearer picture of the situation, since in the future these children will join the ranks of adult illiterates. In the following sections, statistics will be based on one or the other definition, depending on the sources cited.

⁴⁵ Actualization: [1.06.2022].

the peak period of work in the field or at a nearby factory⁴⁶. Female illiteracy is another indicator of their relative neglect in Indian society. According to the 2001 census, about 46% of women were illiterate, while among men, 24% could not write or read⁴⁷.

Table 2. The number of Indian residents who can write and read according to the data from 2001 and 2011

Literate/illiterate	Total	Men	Women
Population over 7 years old			
2001	864,900,041	447,214,823	417,685,218
2011	1,051,404,094	540,772,113	510,632,022
Literate			
2001	560,753,179	336,571,882	224,181,357
2011	779,454,120	444,203,762	334,250,358
Illiterate			
2001	304,146,862	110,643,001	193,503,861
2011	272,950,015	96,568,351	176,381,664
difference	-31,196,847	-14,074,650	-17,122,197

Source: The Census of India, Provisional Population Totals, India 2011.

In the 21st century, more than 1/4 of the Indian population is illiterate, the majority of whom are women. The geographical distribution of illiteracy is of great importance. Several northern states have the highest levels of illiteracy⁴⁸. As an example, despite many attempts by the government and non-governmental institutions to reduce illiteracy, in several states, instead of decreasing, the number of illiterate people

⁴⁶ See P. Łodziński, *W dążeniu do równości*, op. cit., p. 151.

⁴⁷ *International Literacy Statistics: A Review of Concepts, Methodology, and Current Data*, Montreal 2008.

⁴⁸ Census of India, *Provisional Population Totals*, India 2011, p. 98.

has increased in the last ten years. It is important to note that the population has more than doubled in the last few decades. Despite the increase in the percentage of literate people, there has been an increase in illiteracy in Rajasthan in absolute numbers. Studies show that in 2001, only 55% of males and 20% of females above the age of 15 could write and read in Rajasthan, while in 2011, 76.5% of males and 44.5% of females could read in the same state⁴⁹. This shows some upward trend but it cannot be said to be a satisfactory result because from 2001 to 2011 the number of illiterate people in Rajasthan has increased from 18,154,176 to 19,145,596 that is by 991,420 which is an increase of 3.18% in 10 years. According to the data from the Census of India, the rate of illiterate women in 2011 was the highest in the whole of India and was 47%⁵⁰.

In 1999, 87.4% of the boy population aged 6-10 years attended school in rural areas in Rajasthan, 82.8% aged 11-14 years and 88.5-88.9 in urban areas. As for girls living in rural areas, 66% went to school at the age of 6-10 years and only 44.9% at the age of 11-14 years, while in urban areas 82.7% at the age of 6-10 years and 75.5% at the age of 11-14 years respectively. In both cases, a downward trend is evident, and the most disturbing is the low participation of girls above the age of 11 years in education (less than 50%)⁵¹.

The social groups with the highest percentage of illiteracy include women, the poorest strata, and rural dwellers. Life in a traditional Indian village does not encourage women to learn to read and write. There is some similarity here with medical care. Just as a parent would take his son to a doctor and send him to school, the education of his daughter and daughter-in-law would be considered unnecessary. The urban middle class sees it differently, but since the vast majority of Indians live in rural areas, those who see the need for women's education are in the minority⁵². Among the wealthier strata of society, women's education is treated as a 'luxury consumption' that can indicate family prestige.

⁴⁹ See G. Kingdon, R. Cassen, K. McNay, L. Visaria, "Education and Literacy", [in] *Twenty First Century India. Population, Economy, Environment and Human Development*, ed. T. Dyson, R. Cassen, L. Visaria, New Delhi 2004, p. 136.

⁵⁰ <http://censusindia.gov.in>, p. 121, access: 20.03.2012.

⁵¹ See G. Kingdon, R. Cassen, K. McNay, L. Visaria, *Education and Literacy*, op. cit., p. 133.

⁵² See D. Rothermund, *Indie*, op. cit., p. 216.

Gender is an important factor that differentiates illiteracy levels in India. The majority of women who cannot read and write live mainly in rural areas and come from the lowest castes, primarily the registered ones. Parents play a huge role in women's education. They are responsible for half of girls' dropouts from elementary school. Casteism favours sons, whose education their parents see as their preparation for their potential role as breadwinners and investment in retirement. In India, the tradition of dowry, which is paid by the parents of the bride to the bridegroom's family, is still vivid. Most often it is a certain sum of money and gifts such as a car, consumer electronics and household appliances. The size of the dowry depends on the caste background of the groom, his socio-economic status, years of his education, the type of education he received⁵³.

Table 3. Share of employed girls in 1991 by selected states

State	Total number of the employed	Rate of girls at 5-14
Andhra Pradeś	5,530,000	10.54%
Bihar	3,350,000	2.93%
Karnataka	5,610,000	8.71%
Madhya Pradesh	4,790,000	8.56%
Rajasthan	4,570,000	7.88%
Uttar Pradesh	3,140,000	2.46%
Bengal Wschodni	3,230,000	2.68%

Source: Census of India 1991.

Place of residence is one of the most important factors influencing illiteracy levels. More than twice as many people can read and write in the city as in the country, and a woman is three times more likely to be educated in the city than in the country. Schoolchildren in the villages are introduced to adult roles, they help their parents with work in the

⁵³ See P. Łodziński, *W dążeniu do równości*, op. cit., p. 136-137.

fields and at home, they take up paid activities that bring immediate income. Ninety percent of working children live in rural areas, where traditional caste divisions play a much greater role than in urban areas. The persistence of educational inequalities in rural areas reflects the strength of caste dependency, which has not been eliminated in recent decades⁵⁴.

According to scientists, the causes of illiteracy can be traced back to parents themselves, who do not see the need to send their children to school, or to poverty, when children are forced to work. Often inadequate curricula that have nothing to do with the realities of everyday life make children feel that they will get nothing valuable from school and that learning will not be useful to them in life⁵⁵. These people do not see the possibility of using the book knowledge they have acquired in rural life.

Teachers themselves also contribute a lot to illiteracy. Most of them work in villages and often evade their duties and do not turn up for work. Studies have shown that 25% of teachers who should be teaching were absent. State authorities have no direct control and cannot check the attendance of teachers, and local governments are unable to discipline them. Teacher unions in India are also very powerful. They only care about salary increases, which leaves them short of funds for school buildings and the like. Researchers suggest that the control of the public education system by teachers' unions is a major reason for the breakdown of education⁵⁶.

A number of problems arise from high illiteracy, including the persistence of successive generations with traditional values and high birth rates. The low level of education of the Indian population hinders political and social reforms and faster economic development. It forces politicians to appeal to traditional values in terms of caste and religion, as these play a dominant role in local communities⁵⁷.

⁵⁴ See *ibidem*, p. 141.

⁵⁵ *International Literacy Statistics: A Review of Concepts, Methodology, and Current Data*, Montreal 2008.

⁵⁶ See D. Rothermund, *Indie*, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

⁵⁷ See K. Dębnicki, *Konflikt i przemoc w systemie politycznym niepodległych Indii*, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED TO COMBAT ILLITERACY

The task of public education is to awaken in the hitherto marginalized individual, a sense of competence and social utility, to instil a commitment to the ideals of equality, dignity, fraternity and freedom, to inculcate respect for democratic processes governing the initiation of discussion, critical appraisal and decision making, to nurture a mind-set characterized by integrity and scientific approach and to form the conviction that talent, qualifications and qualities of character should be valued. The only way to release potential among Indians, lies not in pulling them out of the bonds of tradition, but in introducing them to a vibrant and growing culture⁵⁸.

According to UNESCO, illiteracy can be prevented by the following means: a legal obligation of compulsory education for boys and girls; monitoring of pupils, teachers and schools by educational supervision; automatic promotion of pupils during initial education, better adaptation of teaching methods and equipping classrooms with appropriate teaching aids; continuous evaluation of pupils' educational progress; close connection between teaching content and people's lives so that the local community and parents can be involved in the school; better teacher training; hiring more teachers; free or subsidized provision of textbooks and learning aids; school meals; transportation to and from school for children who live far away⁵⁹.

The institution created to combat illiteracy among young people and adults is the "National Literacy Mission", established in the 1980s. Its main task is to teach children and adults to read and write, as well as to implement the idea of permanent education, according to which teaching lasts throughout life and takes various forms. The most popular forms of teaching in India are: religious festivals, processions, local art, puppet theatre, and folk songs⁶⁰. NLM activities are focused on the problems of children in the age group of 9-14 years and people in the age group of 15-35 years who have not benefited from educational

⁵⁸ See G. L. Gutek, *Philosophical and Ideological Perspectives on Education*, Englewood Cliffs 1988, p. 308.

⁵⁹ *International Literacy Statistics*, op. cit.

⁶⁰ <http://www.nlm.nic.in/>, access: 20.03.2012.

opportunities in the past or have not had access to the education system. Special emphasis is placed on extending the program to groups with fewer educational opportunities: women and children with learning difficulties as well as tribal and ethnic minority populations, untouchables and marginalized groups. In 1999, UNESCO presented NLM with an award for outstanding achievements in the field of combating illiteracy⁶¹.

One of the organizations set up for education is the SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), which by 2009 created more than 2 million new schools, thus helping to reduce illiteracy. The other institution fighting illiteracy is RMSA (Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan). It is mainly concerned with improving the quality of secondary education, removing socio-economic barriers and increasing access to secondary education. The most successful in the fight against illiteracy is the introduction of meals for all children attending school. The number of children enrolled in elementary school has increased significantly, from 34 million in 1961 to 209 million in 2005⁶².

As the need for education has increased in recent years, many states have begun hiring so-called 'para-teachers'. Currently, there are about 400,000 of them working all over India. These are people with no specialized training, working for very low salaries, without a permanent contract. However, they perform their tasks better than government-paid teachers. As their jobs are insecure and their salaries are paid by the local government, they have to work hard to keep them⁶³.

One aspect of the new social education in India is the activation of youth, both urban and rural, to fight illiteracy. The National Service Scheme (NSS) promoted in 2001-2002 by 176 universities, aimed at setting up camps in villages, slum activities, to foster participation in foreign projects by young people⁶⁴.

In contrast to the theories formulated in the 1960s, when top-down modernization by central authorities was advocated, the importance of initiatives taken by people with their own ideas and plans who put them into practice at the local level is now emphasized. The school can become a vehicle for directing social change and reform. Teachers and students

⁶¹ See H. Mystek-Palka, "Edukacja dorosłych w Indiach", op. cit., p. 330.

⁶² Government of India, *Economic Survey 2010*, p. 270.

⁶³ See D. Rothermund, *Indie*, op. cit., p. 227.

⁶⁴ See P. Tokarski, P. Bhutani, *Nowoczesne Indie*, op. cit., p. 129.

should engage in action-oriented, solution-seeking research activity. This is based on the belief that there is a close relationship between school and society. Unresolved conflicts and tensions within the wider community spill over to school, teachers and students. For example, if Indian students are poor, hungry or discriminated against, their attitudes, aspirations and expectations of education may become distorted, eventually leading them to drop out of school. The role of this institution, therefore, becomes to help diagnose and identify the major problems that contribute to the cultural crisis and to instil the skills and attitudes that will address these problems. Illiteracy will not be eradicated until child labour is eliminated and parents are punished for not sending their children to school. Educational policies and programs must be developed to reform the society. This will not be possible unless the poorest people of India are made aware of the importance of educational development.

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