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International Literacy Day 2023: Know About Remarkable Progress Made By India

To improve adult literacy, the Education Ministry promoted the Saakshar Bharat scheme in 404 rural districts across 26 states and one Union Territory.

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The literacy rate among Indian women has increased from 9% to 77% since independence.



New Delhi: Since 1967, International Literacy Day (ILD) has been observed annually worldwide to emphasize the importance of literacy as a fundamental aspect of human dignity and rights, as well as to promote efforts to enhance literacy with the aim of building a more sustainable society.

Despite consistent advancements on a global scale, the issue of literacy continues to pose substantial challenges. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), as of 2020, a staggering 763 million young individuals and adults in the world still lacked essential literacy skills. Recent crises - Covid-19 pandemic, climate change impacts, and conflicts - have only worsened the existing challenges.

During its 14th Session held in November 1966, UNESCO officially declared September 8 as International Literacy Day (ILD). Since that time, most United Nations member states have consistently marked this date annually. The fundamental purpose of celebrating the ILD is to bolster public sentiment in favor of continuous efforts to combat illiteracy.

UNESCO holds a central role in organizing International Literacy Day commemorations, which encompass worldwide, global, and regional levels, as well as events at the national and community levels.

As we celebrate International Literacy Day, let's take a look at where India and its states stand in terms of literacy:

The literacy rate among Indian women has witnessed significant progress over the years. In the early days of India's independence, a mere one out of eleven girls, approximately nine per cent, were literate, as reported by the World Bank.

Today, the literacy rate among women in India has surged to 77 per cent, whereas the literacy rate among men stands at 84 per cent.

Bihar holds the lowest literacy rate in the country, with Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan following closely, as stated by the Ministry of Education. According to the ministry, the literacy rate in rural India stands at 67.77 per cent, while in urban India, it is 84.11 per cent.

Union Minister of State for Education, Annapurna Devi, shared this information in response to a written question in Lok Sabha in March 2023. She said, "The Samagra Shiksha scheme outlines a comprehensive educational continuum, spanning from pre-school, primary, upper primary, secondary to senior secondary levels. The central government supports states and Union Territories in implementing Samagra Shiksha to ensure universal access and retention, address gender and social category disparities in education, and enhance children's learning outcomes at all school levels."

Based on data shared by the Ministry of Education, Bihar has the lowest literacy rate at 61.8 per cent, followed by Arunachal Pradesh at 65.3 per cent and Rajasthan at 66.1 per cent. Conversely, Kerala boasts the highest literacy rate at 94 per cent, with Lakshadweep at 91.85 per cent and Mizoram at 91.33 per cent.

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To boost adult literacy rates in the country, the ministry highlighted the centrally sponsored Saakshar Bharat scheme. This initiative was implemented in rural areas of 404 districts across 26 states and one Union Territory, targeting areas with adult female literacy rates of 50 per cent or lower, as per Census 2001, including districts affected by left-wing extremism.

The minister said, "The goal was to increase the country's overall literacy rate to 80 per cent and reduce the gender gap to 10 percentage points by the end of the XII five-year plan. The scheme was extended until March 31, 2018. During the Saakshar Bharat scheme's implementation, out of the total target of educating 7.00 crore adult non-literates, approximately 7.64 crore learners who successfully passed the biannual Basic Literacy Assessment Tests administered by the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) between August 2010 and March 2018 were certified as literate."

(With inputs from agencies and UNESCO's official website)

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